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COMMONWEAL

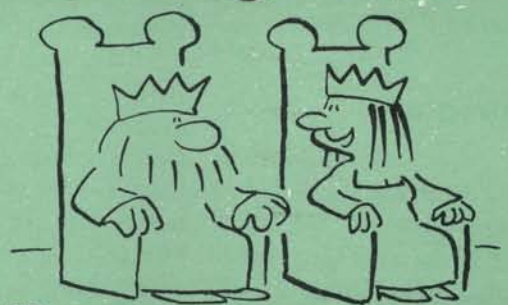
CATHOLIC WRITERS SERIES

DAVID LODGE: THE MACHINERY OF ILLUSION & EFFECT

Edward T. Wheeler

SOLIDARITY ENDURES A CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE

Mark O'Connor



"Do you remember our first quarrel? It was about the partition of Poland."

TERM
TERM
Hehir
itors

LEE SIEGEL reviews
A Miracle, a Universe

Religious Booknotes: Lawrence S. Cunningham

MARY PAT KELLY reviews TOM O'BRIEN'S movie book

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CORRESPONDENCE

Kudos for di Canzio

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: Picked up the July 13 edition from the rack at St. John Fisher Church where I happened to run for Mass this A.M. before my classes start. With my coffee, I read William di Canzio's "An Encounter with Lady Poverty" and was transported to that world of New Haven and St. Thomas More Chapel, aptly described as "self-conscious about being Catholic in such a setting." Every time I visited while two of my kids were at Yale it was grey and raining. For me, di Canzio evoked a sense of place and created a most memorable lady. Maybe he should stop worrying about whether his plays sell and stick to this kind of writing—doubtless, though, he can do both. I salute this issue and may soon be able to subscribe again....

MARY JANE GROGAN KEARNEY

Israel's origins

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: I must take exception to Margaret O'Brien Steinfels's "Report on Israel" [May 4] on several issues. According to the article, Hannah Arendt "hoped that by developing new forms of government cooperation with the Arabs, the Jewish people would give the world alternatives....Her view did not prevail." This implies that it was the fault of the Jews living in pre-1948 Palestine that Arendt's views did not prevail. To be fair, the writer should have mentioned that the Jewish people were willing to accept the United Nations partition plan creating a Jewish state and an Arab state, but that the Arab world refused to accept the plan and, when Israel declared its independence, attacked the fledgling state. The article also refers to "statistics widely quoted" showing the Israeli public favoring "land for peace." The majority do favor land for peace but only if there is assurance of national security.

I urge you to report the news in an objective fashion and not hold Israel to some messianic standard. ASHER LABEND

The author replies:

I question the usefulness of once more reviving the debate over the events of 1948, but if it's to be done an opposing view of that history should be heard. One perspective holds that the United Nations' partition plan was an illegitimate expropriation of Arab lands, homes, and resources, motivated in large part by Western guilt over the Holocaust and sympathy for its victims, and conceived in ignorance of the region, its history, and its inhabitants.

Hannah Arendt's opposition to the creation of a specifically Jewish state predated the proclamation of the UN plan. She preferred a secular, democratic, and pluralist state because she thought it would be better able to create a just and peaceful *modus vivendi* in the region. In my stay I found that today some Israeli Jews, Zionists like Arendt, share her concern over racism and excessive nationalism and question their leaders' willingness to take (or respond to) initiatives aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement. To report these sentiments is not to impose a "messianic standard" on Israel.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

Newman for now

Glencoe, Mo.

To the Editors: On an August Sunday in 1962, a year after the erection of the Berlin Wall, I attended Mass in East Berlin, celebrated in a makeshift chapel in an apartment house. I have long since forgotten the readings and the homily based on them—but not the rapt attention of the small flock to their pastor's words. Without referring once to politics or the daily pressure of the militantly atheistic state on those with courage to practice their faith, the preacher proclaimed a spiritually powerful message of trust in God's providence in dark and difficult times.

I recalled this experience as I read Joseph A. Komonchak's fine article on "Newman's Infallible Instincts" [August 10]. With great skill, and without a single reference to contemporary events, Komonchak has collected, from the vast corpus of Newman's writings, passages that speak directly and powerfully to our present ecclesial situation. One hopes that it will be widely read.

(THE REV.) JOHN JAY HUGHES

The writer, a church historian, is pastor of St. Alban parish in Glencoe.

Elbow room, yes

Dayton, Ohio

To the Editors: My thanks to *Commonweal* for giving us Joseph A. Komonchak's hundredth-year memorial piece on Cardinal Newman's life....I've been an admirer of Newman since reading his *Present Position of Catholics in England*. Newman was ahead of his time, no doubt, but surely his from-the-grave plea for "elbow room" should not go unheeded today.

BOB MASS

Commonweal *welcomes letters to the editors. Because of space limitations, they may be subject to editing.*

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Lesser evils

War fever waxes and wanes in the Middle East. For the moment there is less talk of a quick fantasy war with its surgical strikes against Iraq's military installations and the deft "taking out" of Saddam Hussein. Calculations of a real war have brought sobering second thoughts—about the unpredictable consequences of chemical weaponry, the likelihood of civilian deaths, and the destruction of Kuwaiti, Iraqi, and Saudi oil-producing capacities.

That leaves the UN trade embargo and economic sanctions against Iraq as the primary alternatives to a shooting war, although they, too, have provoked second thoughts. Those second thoughts have been focused, above all, on the matter of exempting food and medicine from the embargo. The United Nations Security Council has acted prudently in providing for humanitarian exceptions to the food embargo but only in genuinely extreme cases, under its own monitoring, and by means of international agencies like the Red Cross.

Before the UN acted, a number of voices were raised rejecting the food embargo as immoral, and they will be raised again not only in objection to the UN plan but in debating specifics of its application. Other objections have been more measured (see Bryan Hehir's column, page 536). But in any case, the questions are real ones. They must not be pondered, however, in some totally abstract fashion removed from the real world of the Gulf conflict and of what is at stake. Under Saddam Hussein's rules of war, food and medicine exempted from the embargo without supervision are not likely to wind up succoring noncombatants, but nourishing the Iraqi military. Indeed, during eight years of war with Iran, Hussein showed an unrelenting callousness not only to the enemy, but to his own people and even to his soldiers and officers. Even as the Security Council was debating the inclusion of food in the embargo, Hussein was using food as a weapon, withholding ration cards from citizens of India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines—countries that have had virtually nothing to do with the conflict.

Unlike Tariq Aziz, Iraq's foreign minister (speaking in an interview with Charlene Hunter-Gault on PBS), we do not reject the distinction between combatants and civilians as morally insignificant. On the other hand, we are not so blind as to imagine that any use of economic sanctions rather than armed force can leave civilians entirely unspared. And in applying economic pressure to the broad population, the burden of suffering will fall first and heaviest on the young, the old, the sick and vulnerable. Wasn't that always the point made by opponents of sanctions against South Africa about the black victims of a stagnant economy? We are obliged to make provision for that eventuality, as the UN has done. If the Iraqi government blocks that provision, or diverts the food to the military, as Aziz suggested, the moral onus falls on Hussein's head.

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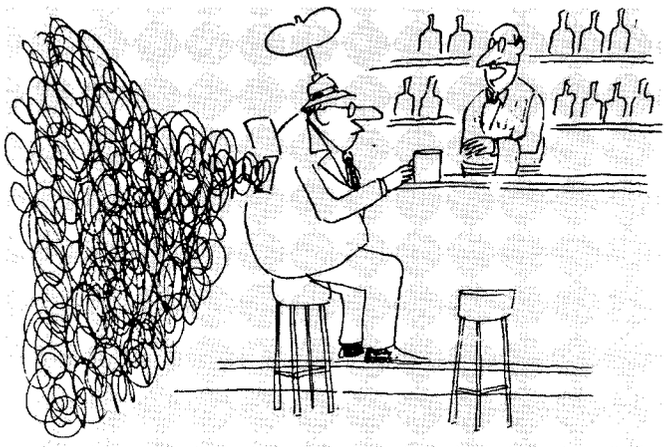

"Could you unwind somewhere else?"

But let us be clear: a food embargo is not tantamount to a strategy of starvation. Iraq was food self-sufficient until Saddam Hussein diverted resources to his military machine in the war with Iran; food stockpiles are estimated to be good for some months. To carry a food embargo past the draining of stockpiles, rationing, belt-tightening, and severe deprivation to the point of mass starvation is another matter, and merely to spell out the distinction underlines how miserable a business it is to engage at all in calculations about degrees of suffering. Anything less, however, is an abdication of moral seriousness, at least for those who genuinely believe that Hussein is an economic and military threat to millions and who genuinely want the embargo and the sanctions to prove an effective alternative to a shooting war. They constitute the lesser of two evils.

In the meantime, the United Nations ought to consider exceptions permitting passage of foodstuffs or medical supplies of little interest to the military. Infant formula, for example, could mitigate damage to the most vulnerable and signal that the world's quarrel is not with the citizens of Iraq—however unfortunate their support of a cruel and self-destructive regime—but with Saddam Hussein.

OUT OF THE FIRE

We were all surprised. First by the invasion's speed, then by the immediate casualties and the rush to take Western hostages; then by the rocketing price of crude followed by the falling markets. Finally, by the inevitable but inevitably unanticipated: the flood of human refugees. This time they poured into the lethal Iraqi and Jordanian deserts, like water into the sand. And once there, they waited in no-one's land, seized by the desert itself and ensnared by international protocols. Hundreds of thousands of instant Bedouins, economic refugees—some, several times over—from most of the poorer Arab countries and much of South Asia. Experienced in displacement, but not armed invasions. Their families and governments had looked to them and their wages from abroad as sources of bread, and even chocolate. Each Bengali expatriate supports eleven people at home; the mass of Egyptian workers in Iraq and Kuwait return roughly $2 billion a year to Cairo.

Unlike oil or peace, the world is awash in human refugees. Roughly 15 million, in every corner of the earth: 800,000 Mozambicans in Malawi; 400,000 Cambodians, Vietnamese, Laotians, and Burmese in Thailand; 3.2 million Afghans in Pakistan; half a million Salvadorans gone north. Those who fled to the Jordanian border found not an oasis but a hellish limbo created by unresponsive governments, UN ineptitude, and rivalry among helper agencies. Touring the area, Jordan's Prince Hassan confirmed the images: "As the downtrodden, the plight of these persons...has evoked only the faintest of responses from the world community."

Stones do not fall into a pool without the waters being moved. If there is to be a new era of worldwide cooperation to counter international violence and piracy, the world's governments will have to anticipate the needs of those like these "hostages of the desert," displaced by such international crises. In this case, home governments did not quickly respond; nor did those nations that had called for a unified UN action. Even though vast amounts of equipment and soldiers were efficiently transported into the region, transport for those displaced was scarce. The Bush administration refused to use U.S. civilian and military transports to evacuate refugees even as the numbers kept rising. Gregory Lobo, a thirty-two-year-old Indian who had lived for thirteen years in Kuwait, put it plainly: "If the planes of George Bush are coming, all the people here will not forget.... If we go home, we don't forget George Bush or American people, never!"

It is time to begin anticipating the inevitable displacements resulting from regional wars. It is past time the world community overhauled international refugee services. And at this burning moment, it is imperative to hasten the flight of those still trapped in no-one's land. That in itself would say a great deal to Saddam Hussein about the world's new cooperation and its resolve.

ET CETERA

VANITIES OF VANITY Let it not be said that Leslie Bennetts of *Vanity Fair* magazine takes a backseat to Jimmy Swaggart when it comes to depicting the lurid allure and unholy scandal of that superstition known as Catholicism. Here is how she sets a didactic scene in her August autopsy of New York's archbishop, Cardinal John O'Connor ("God's Man in New York"). "So deep and low it seems to be emanating from the bowels of the earth itself, the basso profundo rumble of the massive organ resonates throughout St. Patrick's Cathedral. The processional has begun to wend its way down the aisle, trailing clouds of incense as the altar server passes by...in the soaring space beneath the great Gothic arches....Finally Cardinal O'Connor himself appears, resplendent in cream-colored vestments embroidered with gold...."

Such implicitly anachronistic piety is juxtaposed to O'Connor's

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purchase of a new sound system for the cathedral and to his headline grabbing Sunday press conferences (recently discontinued), felicitously referred to as a "real gang bang" by one anonymous reporter.

Bennetts casts an especially polemical eye on the cardinal's incriminating worldly surroundings. Indeed, her piece often reads like the inventory of a suspicious IRS agent. O'Connor's "imperial" residence could be the hideaway of a brigand: "jewel-toned Oriental rugs, scarlet upholstery...ornate gold-framed portraits...amethyst Venetian-glass goblets thickly encrusted with elaborate ornamentation...rococo wood paneling." But this is an old and feeble canard: Catholicism's hypocrisy is as obvious as the polish on the chalice, didn't you know?

Bennetts's intellectual argument is equally sophisticated. Before the perverse obstinacy of the church's presence in the world's most sophisticated city, she and her sources, many of them Catholic, mumble the sacred words of exorcism: "dogmatic," "unyielding," "authoritarian," "fanatic," "religious zealot," "homophobe." You know the ritual.

This journalistic mugging is part of a regal procession of *Vanity Fair*'s own, where readers wend their way past those Hollywood prelates Marlon Brando and Harrison Ford and a smattering of less resplendently remunerated altar servers. The whole reading experience is embroidered with glossy ads for clothes, booze, cars, and cigarettes while the magazine itself is sanctified by that modern joss stick, Eternity For Men by Calvin Klein. Whichever way you approach it, it smells.

Eternal truth be told, fretting so extravagantly over the power of Catholic prelates seems even more anachronistic than the incense in their cathedrals or the scarlet upholstery in their parlors.

BOTTOM LINE NUMBERS By United Nations criteria, there are forty-one nations in the world qualifying as "least developed countries" (LDCs). They have a total population of 400 million, or 8 percent of the world's, though one in seven children dies before the age of two. On average, life expectancy in these countries is forty-nine; average per capita annual income is $227. Comparable figures for the developed world are seventy-three and $15,610. In the 1980s, economic growth in the poorest countries averaged 2.3 percent; populations grew 2.6 percent, so that per capita income fell by 0.9 [nine-tenths of one] percent.

These figures are cited in a *New York Times* story (September 4) on a United Nations conference taking place in Paris at which efforts were made to set new guidelines for foreign aid from the industrialized nations to the LDCs. At the first such conference, held in 1981, the affluent countries agreed to increase their aid to 0.15 [fifteen one-hundredths of one] percent of their gross national product. In fact, the current aid level averages .09 percent. The U.S. gives .04 percent; Japan, .07 percent; France, about 0.15 per cent; some Scandinavian countries, 0.20 percent.

The *Times* article appeared at the bottom of the first business page, page 53 of that day's paper. It occupied thirty-four column inches of space. Next to it ran a fifty-two-inch story about a new corporate strategy being considered by Alexander's, a department store chain in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey. Alexander's runs twelve stores.

REPORT FROM CORNWALL STREET

'LOVE, ELLEN TREADWAY'

WHAT GOOD TEACHERS TEACH

An educational battle has been waging in the three-family house on Cornwall Street of Donal and Regina Stafford. The family was hit hard last summer when it learned that budget cuts had permanently closed several city schools, including their son's. A friend of the Staffords, I observed them dashing around to find a new school for seventeen-year-old Leroy, and listened to Regina describe herself as a woman who had just learned she has two weeks to live.

"I'm not sure a divorce wouldn't have been easier for this family. Everything we worked to achieve, knocked out in one punch. There have to be sure things in life.

"The moment you give birth to a child you think schools. Where can you live where the schools are good? Yes, you live where you can, you live with your own kind; but who ever dreamed that a school this size in a city big as this would suddenly just up and go way? It's like we all got abandoned. All this tax money paid and we're going out hunting for schools.

"I know this would insult folks, but I heard the news on television and I felt like the government had just come into my house and told me my son had been killed in a war. My body's hurting from it. Why even go through the trouble of making a home for your children, pushing your values on them? Doesn't the government have to support us? Is it always *us* against the world? The big against the little? We can't do nothing about it. The decision was made. No one's going to change their minds. Someone has to go, and we're it.

"That school was hardly fine, but it was ours. There were good families, and good teachers. We were together. Now we're all by ourselves again. Little folks are told they got to crawl, big folks spend their money getting their children tutored for the college boards. Who helps us now? Who's *ever* helped us?"

Describing himself as shy, self-doubting, and an average student, Leroy Stafford felt himself somehow changing in Mrs. Treadway's junior English course. Around Thanksgiving, the year before, he had told me how at first the students resented having to read George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. They argued the books were irrelevant and just plain too difficult. He recalled Mrs. Treadway approaching him after the first assignment, on which he had received a D. She asked him what he thought of the readings. He told her he enjoyed them. Mrs. Treadway had just looked at him and grinned. "You lie terribly, L," she said, using his nickname to provoke him. "Write the paper again. We'll forget the grade."

His immediate reaction, he recalled, was relief, followed at once by dread. He dreaded the thought of trying to convince his mother that Mrs. Treadway had given him a second chance. He knew his mother would never believe him. He knew, too, she would make

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an appointment to see the teacher. "She's always meddling in my life," he had muttered, interrupting his account. "She says she knows she does but she still don't stop it. Promises me every day to stop, but she never does. Woman meddles too much in my life."

Mrs. Stafford did make an appointment with Mrs. Treadway, and Leroy was ordered to attend the meeting. When the English teacher confirmed the boy's words, Mrs. Stafford remained silent. Leroy remembered that part of the conversation all too well. He remembered, too, Mrs. Treadway assuring his mother that he was intelligent and capable of doing college work. For once, he reported, nobody was arguing, nobody was complaining or directing their anger at unseen school officials. Mrs. Treadway was drawing a plan, a human blueprint. Sitting in the classroom in the large high school that would be shut down nine months later, Leroy recognized that his mother saw another woman succeeding her in directing his intellectual life, and perhaps his entire future as well.

When the announcement came in August that his school was to be permanently closed, Leroy could not help but hear his mother's rage. Everyone close to Regina heard it. He heard outright fury as well at the crowded, raucous evening meeting with representatives of the city's school committee. The following morning he described what had passed through his mind the previous night. He felt no anger, only sadness, as if someone had died. He had looked in vain for Mrs. Treadway at the meeting, and he recalled how his friends had mocked her for her flamboyant clothes and joyous reactions to literary passages. He admitted that occasionally he joined them and never revealed his true feelings about the one person who had given him a belief in his intelligence.

Leroy would not see Mrs. Treadway again. He would complete high school somewhere, but without her, although he confessed to a fantasy of her being his teacher in his new school. "The politicians," he said, "took it away from us, but Mrs. Treadway gave it back." She had given her gifts to several of his friends as well, he had discovered recently, and each one had reacted as Leroy had. All the families, all the students, like his mother, remained silently indebted.

One morning in late August with Leroy still uncertain where he would attend school and his mother continuing to vent such anger at the school committee that Leroy could barely speak with her, I sat in the Stafford living room drinking coffee. The mail that morning had brought a postcard from Yugoslavia that had lifted everyone's spirits. An aerial view revealed a seaport town with glistening blue water and handsome sailboats. The message read: "Dear Leroy, Schools can close or be closed in your face, but they cannot close your mind. It is too good and too strong. The mind can withstand events like these, for it is made of endless strength. Count on that as I count on you. Love, Ellen Treadway."

"Bless that woman a thousand times," Regina whispered, holding the card tightly. "She's the one going to get him through."

We watched Leroy leave the room, using the excuse that he had to blow his nose. Upon returning, he announced he was going to work. "Turn around," his mother ordered with a smile. He grinned at her and obediently shoved his behind in her direction. Poking out of his back pocket was a copy of Orwell's *1984*. A ragged bookmark revealed him to be about three-quarters of the way through. Then he was gone.

"Boy's going to make it," Regina Stafford said proudly. "Schools won't but he will." She turned in her small kitchen and straightened her pile of newspaper accounts of school closings, tapping the edges to get them even. When this was done, she carefully tucked them into the pages of a hard cover copy of *Huckleberry Finn*. Uncharacteristically, she never stopped smiling.

THOMAS J. COTTLE

Thomas J. Cottle is Lecturer on Psychology, Harvard Medical School. Among his books are Children's Secrets: Private Lives and Public Accounts, *and* Voices of School. *The names in this account have been changed.*

OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

DON'T BE OFFENDED

CORRECT-THINK ON CULTURE

We are allowed, at last, to take offense. It is a step in the right direction, though still quite limited. It is all right to take offense at Andrew "Dice" Clay or 2 Live Crew; it is, however, seldom if ever all right to take offense at what believers would call blasphemy. When the Supreme Court allowed the idea of community standards to play a role in the definition of prohibitable obscenity, the definition was considered too vague by many opponents of censorship. But there is a set of community standards which prevail among secular folks, and they define what is obscene, and what is not, which thinking is correct, and which isn't, with all the firmness and all the rigid absurdity of a Jesse Helms deciding which sorts of art ought not to be paid for by the taxpayer.

The absurd lengths to which this "correct-think" can be taken was revealed recently in a decision by Actors' Equity, reversed when the play's New York run was canceled, to refuse a white actor permission to portray a Eurasian on the New York stage. Some of my best friends (and indeed half of my family) are Asian; but where will this lead? Someone white may not portray someone half-white and half-oriental, but someone oriental may? The idea that one race effectively cancels out the other would be agreed to by Hitler's theorists and by the people who enforced the old miscegenation laws in a number of American states, but it's odd to see it coming from liberals. This aside, does the decision cancel out the New York performance of Noh and Kabuki dramas, where men traditionally portray women? May no white actor portray Othello—or black

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actor portray white southerner Big Daddy or the Italian Romeo, or oriental actor portray the clearly Scottish Macbeth?

Another absurdity is the argument advanced by some critics that the violent and woman-hating lyrics of 2 Live Crew are an expression of black culture, and therefore should be looked at with some indulgence rather than with disgust. George Will saw through this ugly condescension in a recent (and excellent) *Newsweek* column, perhaps the only Will column I've agreed with in years. There is either an ignorance of what culture means here, or a refusal to make distinctions, which is equivalent to putting Andrew "Dice" Clay and Bach in the same category because both represent white culture.

It was good, anyway, to see Nora Dunn refuse to appear on "Saturday Night Live" on the night of Andrew "Dice" Clay's appearance, and then to see Sinead O'Connor also refuse to appear after Dunn's refusal. This isn't a question of censorship, but of civilized taste elevated to the level of moral action. Anyone who has heard just a little (it goes a very long way) of Clay's woman-hating, gay-baiting attempts at humor can't really buy into the notion that this satirizes macho attitudes; the audience response makes it clear that Clay plays to his audience's worst instincts. Skinhead musicians could make the same claim for their diatribes against Jews and Asians and blacks. Dunn's action was a healthy beginning.

There are limits, though, to those areas in which we are allowed to be offended. The responses of many critics to the Mapplethorpe exhibit, and to the infamous photograph of a crucifix in a tank of urine, made all the objectors seem cut from the same fundamentalist mold. My doubts about government funding boil down to wondering whether the government should fund the arts at all, given the fact that millions of Americans don't have and can't afford the most minimal health insurance; and I can't believe the naiveté of those who believe that government funding ever exists independently of a degree of government control. In any case, I wonder why a laborer who hates his job on an assembly line should fund, against his will (we are talking, after all, about taxes), the activities of an artist who loves the work he is doing, even the most benign and sweet sort of artist, even a carver of mallard ducks or painter of apple-dotted landscapes.

This question to the side, Peter Steinfels quoted a Manhattan writer in a *New York Times* article on this controversy, and I've been thinking about a divide she illuminates with rare concision: I am now unable to display a crèche at the taxpayers' expense or on public property—unless I soak it in urine, in which case I can get a government grant.

It is all right, correct-think would say, to be offended at slurs against women and racial minorities and homosexuals—indeed, it is obligatory. To be offended at antireligious language or behavior, however, is to reveal a narrow and unenlightened spirit. In an interesting *New York Times Book Review* survey of several books on the Salman Rushdie affair, Edward Mortimer writes, "Perhaps he was insensitive to treat so playfully a subject that for millions of people is deadly serious (though I cannot help feeling that coming to tolerate such playfulness is a necessary step for Muslims on the road to enlightenment and freedom)."

A whole set of assumptions lies between those parentheses. Enlightenment and freedom are to be found in the toleration of "playfulness" about a sacred subject—one in which Rushdie does not believe. His playfulness is to be regarded as amusing

"Boy, did we get a tough question today! 'What is art?' "

by people who see in Mohammed a prophet sent to reveal God's will to the human race, as if God's mercy didn't really matter all that much. Are people like Andrew "Dice" Clay, 2 Live Crew, and racist skinheads not being playful, at least at some levels? Is there no animosity, no banked down hatred and resentment in Rushdie's work? The assumption is, however, that racism and sexism are about the real world, whereas religion is about something less important than our social arrangements and agreed-upon standards of justice. The idea of the sacred is assumed to be something about which no one will be publicly serious or passionate. Another assumption is that the word "enlightenment" does not mean clear and unencumbered perception, but rather the particular set of beliefs that saw their birth during the Enlightenment: secularism is assumed to be superior to religion; personal autonomy is an ideal; and the collective understanding of a community centered around a belief that some truths are radiant—a belief that the sacred matters more than anything else—is considered socially irrelevant.

Mortimer speaks of "sensitivity" here, as if it were a question of being considerate of others' feelings, and of course this is the beginning of civility. Our objection to racist slurs, however, is not merely that they are insensitive to the feelings of those who would be offended by them; the objection is that racism itself is false, a wrong understanding. This is an article of faith in a liberal democracy, an appropriate one. The reasons for which we are supposed to be careful of the religious beliefs of others, however, is not that religion represents anything real, or that an antireligious mentality is, like racism, based in illusion. It is more on the order of not calling someone's child or mate ugly or stupid.

To the extent that religious people buy into this mentality, we accept the relative unimportance of what we claim to be about. I don't mean that we should try to spend public money on sacred art, or censor those who disagree with us. We can agree wholeheartedly with the offense taken by Nora Dunn and George Will. It is similarly important to be offended at someone who ridicules religious symbols, our own or those of others. We must, on occasion, have the good grace to be offended. □

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J. Bryan Hehir

SHORT-TERM, LONG-TERM

PROPER MEANS IN THE GULF

The situation in the Persian Gulf can be looked at as an immediate crisis, but also as a long-term learning experience for the "post-cold war era." Because it has this two-dimentional quality, policy measures should be evaluated in light of their short-term impact and long-term implications. My purpose is to attempt such an evaluation for two different aspects of the problem: its political meaning and its humanitarian character.

In political terms Iraq's invasion of Kuwait posed a double challenge. First international order is based upon respect for state sovereignty, recognized boundaries, and observance of the principle of nonintervention. Each of these three ideas can be criticized or at least placed in perpective. Sovereignty—politically and morally—is a relative, not an absolute value; the boundaries in question in the Middle East are the product of the age of colonialism, not divine decree; nonintervention is challenged and violated in diverse ways in an interdependent world. For all their limits and relativity, however, these three concepts sustain the values of a fragile peace, some order, and minimal justice in a world of states. The Iraqi invasion violated all three of these foundational ideas without justification.

Second, unlike an invasion in Central Africa, the Iraqi move profoundly challenged the international economic order. Oil sets the Middle East apart in world affairs. This fact needs to be sharply distinguished from the first: the price of oil does not carry the normative weight of sovereignty, boundaries, and nonintervention. There is no divine right for Americans or others to have access to oil at $20 per barrel. Indeed determining an appropriate price for raw materials remains a very unfinished issue, morally, in international affairs. Yet here again, one can acknowledge the problem and still recognize that by invading Kuwait and threatening Saudi Arabia, Saddam Hussein is challenging and threatening a larger framework of economic welfare than just America's consumptive energy habits.

The double challenge posed by the Iraqi invasion constituted a "just cause" for a defense response. The response has been driven by U.S. policy, but the Bush administration wisely invested extensive energy in shaping an international consensus and framework for the policy. It is now in place: an embargo supported by six UN Security Council resolutions (including explicit Soviet support), supplemented by an Arab League condemnation of Iraq and the deployment of Arab, French, and English military forces in the Gulf.

The response has short- and long-term significance. Immediately, it has achieved one objective (deterrence against Iraqi inclinations to continue on to Saudi Arabia); it has a reasonable hope of achieving Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait; and it has a much slimmer possibility of restoring the Emir to the throne.

The long-term significance of the response lies in its status as the first "post-cold war" crisis. The reasonable expectation that U.S.-Soviet tensions will decline in the coming decade is not matched by expectations that regional conflicts will correspondingly diminish in number or intensity. Such conflicts have local roots and long histories. The disengagement of the superpowers from areas previously regarded as "vitally important" in the cold war competition may in fact make local conflicts more likely. Many of these will be humanly tragic, but most will not be seen as globally crucial. The Middle East is the exception; regional conflict there—because of Israel and oil—has always had global implications.

Three characteristics of the response to Iraq's move stand out. First, the multilateral nature of the response, coordinated through the Security Council, moves the United Nations to center-stage in a fashion unthinkable during the cold war. In Korea the UN played a role *in spite* of the superpower rivalry. Today the role the Security Council is playing and the astute leadership provided by the secretary general in the Iran-Iraq war, in Afghanistan, and in Cambodia have combined to put the UN in a leadership role in the post-cold war era.

Second, a major display of U.S. military force has accompanied the multilateral response. A *defensive* response was justified and the deployment of force at this writing (September 7) has been of a defensive, deterrent nature. I am not of the view that going to the offense—in case sanctions do not remove the Iraqis from Kuwait—would be justified. Nor do I believe that moving to the offense would be sustained by the international consensus which President Bush has skillfully assembled. The multilateral precedent so usefully in place both supports U.S. actions thus far and serves to contain future options. Going offensive would mean going it alone.

Third, the coalition assembled against Iraq in the Arab world has substantially redesigned the hierarchy in the Arab state system. This coalition would surely never

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survive going beyond deterrence and defense. On the other hand, if the sanctions can be successfully pursued, the new configuration of power might provide a foothold for an initiative in diplomacy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian question.

"Just causes" must be pursued by "just means"; as a policy measure the embargo is in principle justified and much preferable to war. But one humanitarian aspect of the embargo has not received sufficient scrutiny. The UN text is skillfully crafted to allow for maximum leverage against Iraq. While medicines are clearly exempted, food is not exempted except for "humanitarian circumstances." The terms of the embargo are a matter of some dispute on the question of food. The U.S. interpretation seems to be that only food distributed through recognized international relief organizations is allowable, and there must be a demonstrable humanitarian need—severe deprivation—before the relief organizations should be activated.

The strategic logic of this interpretation—maximum pressure, including food—is clear. Its moral justification is much less clear. A case could be made for restricting delivery of food to Iraq to relief organizations, provided they are capable of the task. It is not justifiable, in my view, to create conditions of crisis—hunger and/or starvation—before humanitarian aid can be offered to Iraq.

Two arguments should be brought to bear against the failure to exempt food now on a humanitarian basis. First, an embargo should pass the same just-means test as any act of war. The first means test is that civilians should not be a "target population." Food and life are inextricably connected. To say we value the latter means making the former available to women, children, the old, and the young. Second, the U.S. case calling for respect for its hostages (and diplomats) is based on the same principle: certain classes of people should not be treated as pawns even under conditions of conflict or war. The U.S. case would be immeasurably strengthened by a clear policy on food and medicine which looks beyond the short-term advantage of maximum strategic pressure to the long-term issue of protecting basic humanitarian and moral principles in the post-cold war era.

Dixie Partridge

Field Pond

We knew as the pond knew,
our spot of earth given, any drought
unfathomed. In the attic during rains
we dressed in feathered hats
and turned the cracked pages
of books from Sweden.

Hollow walls reached into rafters
where clothes in trunks
smelled of immigrant darkness, and all
the same colors—browns and newsprint beige,
limp as the strange ringlet of hair
pressed in a book.
We snailed into sleep like Hummel children,
antiqued by what the attic held
and the rains recited on windows.

When we were old enough
to walk the farm by ourselves,
the field pond had vanished,
and we forgot it, though Dad
always spoke of it,
how plentiful the land seemed then.
He had taken us wading
when we could barely stand,
was distressed we couldn't remember.

We helped in hayfields grown more sunburned
every year, irrigation streams
never enough, our sweltering faces
separate against the empty sky.
I abandoned games and hiding places,
began to use the attic for storage
of what could be set aside.

As we return through years,
our father points out the hollow
that held the pond,
as if by some miracle it might come back.
The drought that took it never passed,
and my dreams still turn
into watery windows, solemn rehearsals
in long, slack dresses and feathered hats.

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THE MACHINERY OF ILLUSION & EFFECT

WATCHING DAVID LODGE AT WORK

EDWARD T. WHEELER

Coming of age as a Catholic in the early fifties in London was not much different from growing up on New York's Staten Island ten years or so later—growing up a Catholic, that is. The same sort of Irish Jansenist spirituality and morality seem to have circulated in the boroughs of both metropolises. The church universal has an unmistakable parochial aspect in David Lodge's early novels; they put in holy card context fasts before Communion, the Hungarian revolution, and the letter to the pope given to the children at Fatima. Some writers make the exotic familiar, some estrange the everyday; others, like Lodge, make the familiar familiar. That is not to say he has nothing new to offer; anyone who lived through those years cannot resist the accuracy and the humor of the recently reissued *Souls and Bodies* (1980, 1989) which traces the movement of the church militant from its pre-Vatican II Latin assurances to the disappearance of Hell and beyond.

Lodge, born in 1935 and now an honorary professor of English literature at Birmingham University, has had an impressive academic career: works on Greene and Waugh, critical theory, narrative forms—and seven novels. One, *Small World* (1984), has recently been adapted for television in Britain. As a critic and reviewer in print and on the small screen, as an editor and essayist, he has proven himself a versatile man of letters. His impact and popularity, however, rest on his gifts as a comic writer.

In the introduction to the 1980 Penguin reissue of the 1965 novel, *The British Museum Is Falling Down*, he describes the sources of his comic impulse:

> I had lighted upon a subject of considerable topical interest and concern...one which had not been treated substantively by any other novelist...that was the effect of the Catholic church's teaching about birth control on the lives of married Catholics and the questioning of that teaching.

The British Museum Is Falling Down is the first of the comic novels, and the tension between sexual impulse and prohibitive restraint has been Lodge's subject since then. The source of the humor had particular historical circumstances—postwar society on the edge of permissiveness, Vatican II and *aggiornamento*, and the introduction of the pill—but Lodge taps knowingly a universal theme, the grotesqueries to which sex drives us all. In *The British Museum* they are unfailingly comic, but as later narrators will tell us some indeed are tragic.

What the church provides by way of tension in Lodge's two overtly Catholic novels, literary pattern and mythic form bring to the "academic" ones. Lodge's professional work in literary theory and success in academic life vie with and then surpass the impact of faith, at least in so far as it supplies the energy for his comic impulse. God, quite simply, does not come into *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984), and *Nice Work* (1989), the comedies that span almost two decades and the fortunes, tenured and otherwise, of Professors Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp. Lodge exploited ecclesiastical tensions in *The British Museum*, changed his focus to that of academic life in *Changing Places*, but returned to the church, if only to lay ghosts, in *Souls and Bodies* (1980). Sex, needless to say, remains a constant.

Lodge's first novel, *The Picturegoers* (1960), one which he describes as a work of "scrupulous realism," offers in germ much of what is to follow: religious turmoil, relevant literary speculation—on Christopher Marlowe and the Immaculate Conception—the handling of a large number of characters through one structuring device—the movie house—and the coming of age of the male protagonist. There is, however, little of the comic in the treatment of Mark Underwood and his suspiciously self-indulgent return to Catholicism. Mark is one of many chief characters whom Lodge invites us to dislike.

The confessional mode of *Ginger, You're Barmy* (1962, 1982) looks back at the experiences of a young Londoner drafted into the army upon completion of his undergraduate degree in English. Conscription for Jonathan Browne forces him, as it did his creator, to postpone a research degree in English literature. The novel is a reminiscence and is prefaced with these words:

> [my] whole story reeks of a curiously inverted, inviolable conceit...I became a voyeur of my own experience.
>
> Even now, it seems, I am not immune from the insinuations of Form. It occurs to me that these notes, which I am jotting down on this momentous morning, might usefully form a prologue and epilogue to the main story.

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Self-deprecating tone, attention called to the use of autobiographical material by the fictional narrator (which is also autobiographical material for the author), self-conscious reference to the demands of fiction—Form requires design, artfulness: all these bear the marks of a writer who might succumb to the burden of his own critical self-consciousness. Yet, Lodge does not; rather he leaves us signposts, invitations to gauge his particular narrative stance against those of his predecessors. *The British Museum* has embedded into it ten passages of pastiche and a structure completed by a sustained parody of Molly Bloom's monologue. The inability of his initial reviewers to detect the clues to allusiveness prompted Lodge in the new introduction to name the writers pastiched and challenge the reader to detect them.

Souls and Bodies' narrator identifies himself as the author of *The British Museum* and quotes a hilarious letter of praise from an appreciative Czech. He also tells the reader he has described the dress of his principals, ten undergraduates, in such a way as to reveal their character traits and muses, citing the dictum of a recent French critic, on how to describe married love. Lodge not only makes the familiar familiar, his narrators employ an ironic familiarity, and invite a sort of conspiracy in which they will share the jokes framed for the unwitting mortals the writer has created. And what sort of jokes? Largely those deriving from the sheltered childhoods bestowed upon them by their Catholic families, their naiveté about sex, their slipping commitment to a traditional world view, and their frustrating attempts to keep the faith, renew the church, and live in the late twentieth century. The tone of the books makes a reader think that Lodge has invited them to be his dinner guests; and the host is expansive, witty, and titillatingly explicit about sex.

Souls and Bodies was issued first in England as *How Far Can You Go?* and as this title implies, it is a book about license. When the vertical axis of faith sticks believers with absolute truths to the horizontal of the real world, the compass they have is no wider than dogma and no more free than the constraints which link the human will to the divine—*per Jesum Christum et Matrem Ecclesiam*. Lodge has his couples face the passing of the "Snakes and Ladders" game plan of faith and confront the problematic freedom that comes when God's hand no longer guides them through the univocal teaching of the church. Rabelais's motto, "Do as you will!" hangs over the swinging sixties. And in that tension between *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* and "Do as you will!" the comic energy of this serious funny novel leaves us with the answer: wait and see. The topicality of the book, its concern with the church's ban on contraception, can, *mutatis mutandis*, be brought ahead ten years and be applied to the abortion debate. "How far can you go?" is for most of the faithful today a vital question.

Here is Lodge describing the mental equipment of his late adolescent Catholics:

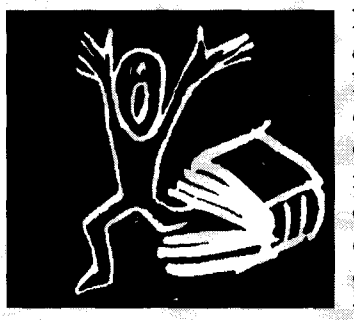
> Up there was Heaven; down there was Hell. The name of the game was Salvation, the object to get to Heaven and avoid Hell. It was like Snakes and Ladders/Chutes and Ladders/; sin sent you plummeting down towards the Pit; the sacraments, good deeds, acts of mortification, enabled you to climb back towards the light. Everything that you did was subject to spiritual accounting.

The spiritual accounting was keenest, of course, in the merits and demerits associated with sex. "Our courtship," declares Dennis, a student we have followed to middle age, "must have been one of the longest drawn-out foreplay sessions in the history of sexuality." We see inexpert gropings, tortured attempts not to go too far, and watch wedding night encounters with their inevitable disappointments. The "How Far Can You Go?" game of course extends beyond courtship and into marriage:

> But just when they began to get the hang of sex—to learn the arts of foreplay, to lose their inhibitions about nakedness, to match each other's orgasmic rhythms—pregnancy or fear of pregnancy intervened, and their spontaneity was destroyed by the tedious regime of calendar and temperature chart.

Under the pressure of the permissive society and with the safety of the pill, the married Catholic couples abandoned the "safe method" and did go to contraception. In one of a series of "straight" authorial discourses to the reader, we hear this:

> So they stood upon the shore of Faith and felt the old dogmas and certainties ebbing away rapidly under their feet and between their toes, sapping the foundations upon which they stood, a situation both agreeably stimulating and slightly unnerving. For we all like to believe, do we not, if only in stories? People who find religious belief absurd are often upset if a novelist breaks the illusion of



Edward T. Wheeler's critical essay on David Lodge is another in our series of articles on contemporary Catholic writers of fiction. We have asked our essayists to give an overview of the author's works, showing our readers where and how this writer locates the central human drama, the big questions, the religious crisis of our time. What does the Catholic sensibility of a David Lodge have to tell us about out common world, about the state of our souls? Previous articles in the series include Rosemary Booth on Mary Gordon (August 12, 1988), John B. Breslin on Andre Dubus (December 2, 1988), Robert E. Hosmer on Muriel Spark (April 21, 1989), Daniel Murtaugh on William Kennedy (May 19, 1989), Paul Baumann on Thomas Kennedy (July 14, 1989), Elizabeth Beverly on Shusaku Endo (September 22, 1989), and J.V. Long on Brian Moore (October 20, 1989).

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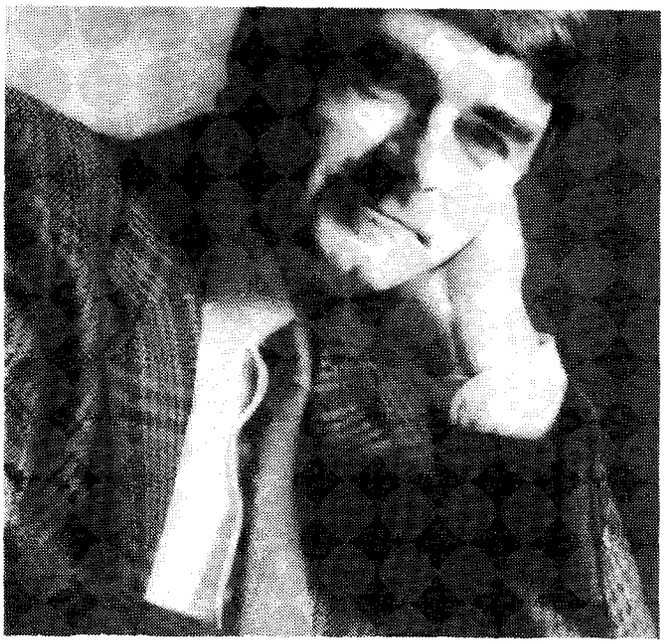

> reality he has created. Our friends had started life with too many beliefs—the penalty of a Catholic upbringing.... they had to dismantle all that apparatus of superfluous belief and discard it piece by piece. But in matters of belief (as of literary convention) it is a nice question how far you can go in this without throwing away something vital.

The last sentence is as good a way as any to describe the tone of this novel: an ironic proposal that something vital has gone. The only character whose life gives us religious assurance is the nun Ruth who, in a quixotic trip to the States to discover what the reform of convents here might teach her order in England, finds in Disneyland a dark night of the soul. Later in an emotional prayer group meeting she experiences an illumination which sustains her to the novel's close. That Lodge should make Ruth at first so skeptical of prayer groups and then have her find in them so profound an experience which he parodies even as he has it enrich is yet another of his teasing novelistic ways of having it all.

In the profession of faith that is the writing of novels, the author is both god and believer, and in being both can happily, ironically (as in the last quotation), raise doubts about the possibility of his own existence. In miming the divine immanence and creative role he calls attention to the demise of the Absolute. The bleak cosmic frame of the story, introduced benignly enough in an exchange between a priest about to give up his vocation and an adolescent looking through a telescope at the infinite universe, tells us that we are until death and little more—"the only immortality...was that of being stored in a kind of cosmic memory bank." Not that God is a joke; the plot unties enough loose strands at the close to allow us to believe that faith is an option. No, we are told, consider this: if God is a joke, then so is the novelist. How can he preserve the absolutism, the unironic refusal to intrude, if the supreme fiction of creation is really a put-on?

Souls and Bodies ends with another fiction, a transcript of a television documentary (the year is 1975) of an Easter Liturgy of the Catholics for An Open Church. The speaker of the last voice-over is coyly unidentified; he says among other things that assessment of Christian belief is like reading or writing a novel:

> ... we maintain a double consciousness of the characters as both, as it were, real and fictitious, free and determined, and know that however absorbing and convincing we may find it, it is not the only story we shall want to read (or, as the case may be, write) but part of an endless sequence of stories by which man has sought and will always seek to make sense of life. And death.

For the narrator and novelist David Lodge, the tensions that faith brings to living the just life and facing the arrival of death seem to lapse with this statement. In the equation he makes above between the divine creative activity and that of the novelist, he introduces a new set of tensions. Three years before this, Lodge had asserted in his theoretical work, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977), "all critical questions about novels must be ultimately reducible to questions about language" and not, as he went on to say, questions about content. The three "academic novels" indicate that the critical theories Lodge pursued at this time gave stimulus to his craft with a new sort of dualism: that between language and reality.

The novels warn us unequivocally about the problems of mixing life and literature: "Literature is mostly about having sex and not having children. Life is the other way around"—so Adam Appleby of *The British Museum*. Yet we might risk indulgence in the fallacy which takes fiction as autobiography to note that the sex in *Souls and Bodies* has undergone a form of exorcism. *Changing Places*, written five years earlier, offered alter-ego Philip Swallow a second sexual awakening without any Catholic traumas. Having opened up such a possibility, it is as if Lodge could not go on as a novelist until he had in *Souls and Bodies* evoked the Demon Sex, named Him with explicit anatomical detail, and summoned Him jocularly enough for us to smile at the nakedness of the grotesques. God and Hell disappear and the pill comes. The new dogmas have names such as "structuralism" and "semiotics." With these models of the way the Word works, Lodge pursues the old demon in new guises.

Changing Places is a very funny novel, one of perfectly balanced plots and self-advertised changes of narrative form. We have a key provided: many references to a manual called *Let's Write a Novel* whose words of advice *Changing Places* cheerfully subverts even as it cites them. The book begins the sequence with Philip Swallow leaving the university at Rummidge (the fictional equivalent of Birmingham) and spending a fateful six months in the year 1969 at Euphoria State University on the West Coast of the United States. His opposite number, Morris Zapp, occupies Philip's position through the same but considerably less turbulent period on the English campus.

The two men change even the most intimate of places, their respective wives' beds and in the grand finale sort themselves out in something like marital reconciliation. The permissiveness of Flower Child California and the vitality of the State of Euphoria

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occasion a second coming of age for Philip, whose English reserve disappears as he joins the "Dionysian hordes." Morris has, by contrast, British reserve to contend with and fittingly he seduces both Hilary Swallow and the Rummidge English faculty by catching the "creeping English disease of niceness."

The fun of *Changing Places* lies in the zany plot, Morris's dead pan, and Philip's inept exploration of women's liberation, sit-ins, happenings, and Desiree Zapp. The novel also offers us a pastiche of narrative styles: epistolary form, newspaper clippings, advertisements, double flashbacks, and the "climactic" reconciliation as movie script. How will the two women and two men pair off? Almost by way of a "cocked snook" the novel equivocates about how art might bring real life situations to some sort of closure. Philip gets to conclude the novel by commenting on the indeterminacy of movie endings which unlike those of novels do not announce their arrival by the diminishing number of pages left to read. If the pill can turn life into "having sex and not having children," which was, as Lodge's Adam Appleby had once quipped, the chief characteristic of literature, then what can literature now do with sex? Equate it with pleasures of the text, not as pornographic stimulation, but as untrammeled play: language's stripteasing revelations (to paraphrase what Morris Zapp will say) of the ways in which literature and life are not the same. To start, literature can mythologize sex.

Small World, which appeared in 1984, nine years after *Changing Places*, is built on the archetype of Romance. It comes complete with a Miss Maidan, a retired university teacher and once a student of Jessie Weston, an enactment in Lausanne of the text of "The Wasteland," and the erratic romantic questing of the hero, young Persse McGarrigle (read Percival) who pursues the illusive and literally duplicit Angelica Pabst. We are left in no doubt, sex is part of the natural cycle and cycle it is: those at the beginning are in the heats and sweats of love and are apt to go to any lengths—in this case any professional literary conference—to fulfill their desires.

The man at the turn of the cycle, Philip Swallow, as he puts it in a telling phrase, is "fucking my way out of the grave" in defiance of death following a near fatal plane crash. Arthur Kingfisher, the doyen of literary critics, is the aged Fisher King and is impotent even in the hands of his manipulating amanuensis, but stiffens suddenly in a spring-like December wind to an old man's virility and, of course, reestablishes control of the realm of literary criticism. Persse asks the questions demanded of every Grail Knight and is granted possession of the woman he desires only to find that he desires another woman.

The sex isn't in the head in this book, it is in the remarkable and remarkably funny design. The tensions are those of inevitability: *schadenfreude* is the italicized expression Lodge uses more than once to gloss his character's responses, a malicious chuckle, of joy in another's defeat, of displacement of the inevitable death that is approaching. Every attempt to "fuck death" and produce a rebirth is sterile, although life is in the trying—which is a consummately pagan and understandable sequel to *Souls and Bodies* where sex threatened a form of spiritual death.

The commonplace that the university stifles the artist has to be reversed in Lodge's case: he makes his art out of the university and, never afraid to teach, offers potted courses in the latest forms of critical theory. His command of theory is such that he can make postmodernist theories thematic. The enlivening ingredients are his way with dialogue and, inevitably, sex.

In Lodge's most recent novel, *Nice Work*, the exotic becomes familiar (and vice versa) in a deconstruction of a cigarette advertisement—significantly the billboard is an icon is a rebus is a representation of the vagina and makes smoking ultimately a surrogate for rape. (Is this book sold in North Carolina?) Our guide through this is Robyn Penrose, a young lecturer in Philip Swallow's department at Rummidge, who is assigned to "shadow" Vic Wilcox, engineer and managing director of a local foundry. They are participants in a government scheme to bridge the two cultures, to mix the ivory tower with the shop floor. Robyn is postmodern, a feminist, and certainly not at all tense about sex. At an early juncture in the novel, she and her significant other, Charles, are having, as the narrator comments in deadpan, "non-penetrative sex," not through fear of AIDS but because Robyn refuses to take the pill for health reasons and Charles finds condoms "unaesthetic." AIDS to heterosexuals, we read "was only a cloud on the horizon, no bigger than a man's hand." The contextual pun on the massage going on apart, there is a sign here which seems deliberately dropped. The hand which presides over this novel is *manus hominis* and not *manus dei*. Sex before AIDS is a matter of choice and self-control, an indulgence like a food which must be had in moderation and in health.

The tension that comes of sex in *Nice Work* is one of interpretation. Robyn, in a moment of champagne abandonment, but still "in control," takes Vic to bed only to find that he reads the act as commitment, worse, as love. The tension in the scenes which follow is that of intention: what the act means and cannot mean. Vic's notions of the signified and signifier are for Robyn ungrounded in any reality. Vic reads romantic love and Robyn reads "fuck." No flesh comes from that word. Typically Robyn deals with her problem as one of interpretation, asserting to a colleague that she is "getting dragged into a classic realist text, full of causality and morality." The plot defuses the tensions with Vic's return to his family life. This is occasioned not by fulfillment through sex (making love) but through metaphor (making meaning)—his family galvanizes around him when he abruptly loses his job. In Robyn's own parlance (the distinction

Books discussed in this article

How Far Can You Go? (Souls and Bodies), *Penguin, 1980.*
Changing Places, *Penguin, 1975.*
Nice Work, *Penguin, 1990.*
Small World, *Macmillan, 1984.*
The British Museum Is Falling Down, *Penguin, 1965.*
Ginger, You're Barmy, *Penguin, 1962.*

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formulated by Roman Jackobson) we have to differentiate metonymy from metaphor, representation from meaning: sex does not mean love. It is not a metaphor for emotion, rather it is "fuck," a metonym for a physical act which means rather less than the act might imply among those creatures who are not readers of signs.

"But repetition is death!" Robyn cried. "Difference is life. Difference is the condition of meaning. Language is a system of differences...."

In the end these words might stand as an epigraph for David Lodge's academic novels; he has one theme, or so it seems, the assertions of sex and the denials of death. He repeats with a difference that theme in each of these comic novels. The delight he takes in the literary theology which sees God as the "ultimate floating signifier" allows him a Wizard-of-Oz-like godhead—only he invites us to come behind the throne and watch the machinery of illusion and effect. Our host for dinner has got to the port stage and is expansive in his insistence on the variety of sameness, of the way in which we deal not with absolutes intersecting time, but only with time which time and time again is betrayed by language.

Nice Work, to be fair, is about a great deal more than sex. Robyn's assertion about "repetition" refers to the dangers of too uniform a literary curriculum and canon, by extension to the nature of the factory work that she has witnessed, to post-industrial England and the ways of corporations, and to the uniformity of university students. Finally *Nice Work* is about commitment to teaching and to family: Robyn does not take the plum job offered to her by Morris Zapp at Euphoria; rather, because of an unexpected legacy, she stays on at Rummidge and even provides the venture capital for Vic's nascent company and renascent family.

Coming into middle age in the English midlands in the early eighties is not unlike coming into middle age some years later in America. Whatever faith the man, David Lodge, now professes (and tell me, gentle Reader, what hermeneutic do we use to interpret the words, "the man"?), we know it is grounded in a Catholic childhood. Reading David Lodge is also like overhearing a confession, an elaborate, improbable, and deliberately shocking confession, meant to redden the ears of reverend father. Lodge's heels seem to poke from under the curtain and wriggle as he half-remembers and half-invents detail after detail. We can only guess his thoughts as he winks slyly at whatever Presence watches the charade and at the blackness beyond the grille. We also hope that he has no firm purpose of amendment.

SOLIDARITY ENDURES A CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE

RESISTING THE URGE FOR REVENGE

MARK O'CONNOR

In April 1988, Professor Zdzislaw Najder, an internationally recognized expert on Joseph Conrad, was carrying on a perfectly Conradian existence: lecturing about literature at the University of Michigan while living under a death sentence imposed in Poland during martial law for Najder's "traitorous" collaboration with Radio Free Europe. A Polish journalist, also leading a double life (as a waiter in an Ann Arbor hotel), interviewed Najder for his assessment of Poland's prospects. Najder singled out Solidarity—at that time still banned—as the key to any solution, the one hope for a way out of Poland's economic and moral morass. "After all," he pointed out, "when we emerge from under the mantle of the *nomenklatura* and an ideologically dictated economic system we will have to find some way of coming to an understanding among ourselves, find some way of searching for common interests in the economy, where the incompatibilities of those interests will be significantly greater than at present." In Najder's views restoring Solidarity—with its fusion of religious values to the struggle for economic-political reform—offered the best chance to reverse the fragmentation produced by the corrosion of totalitarianism, a fragmentation sure to be exacerbated by the painful transition to a market economy and private initiative.

These days Najder gets to follow Poland's post-Communist sociopolitical conflicts up close. In fact, since he was appointed chairman of Solidarity's Citizens' Committees by Lech Walesa, he has become enmeshed in them. Far from minimizing political differences within Solidarity, the Walesa camp has chosen to accentuate conflict. Ever since last spring when he initiated the "war at the top" against the *nomenklatura*, Poland's "reformed" politics has become bellicose. The "war at the top" then turned into the "battle over Walesa" and now we have the "war over Solidarity," with its key players—Walesa and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, along with Adam Michnik, Bronislaw Geremek,

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and Jaroslaw Kaczynski—as the principal antagonists, and Solidarity's religious underpinnings most at stake. Now that the "war" is no longer against the Communists, but has become fratricidal, can Solidarity's Christian outlook be preserved? Everyone hopes so, but with the passing of the Communist threat the question of Solidarity's moral vision is now the source of dispute. At the heart of this debate between the "Walesa" and "Michnik" factions is coming to terms with Poland's Communist past.

Until recently, if one were to highlight the chief symbol associated with Walesa, it would have been the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa—Holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Poland—which he has worn on his lapel since emerging from the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk a decade ago. Here modern Polish nationalism and religious consciousness meet. The monastery at Czestochowa and its famous icon have been at the heart of political consciousness since the seventeenth century when Sweden failed to conquer Czestochowa after overwhelming the rest of Poland. From Czestochowa began the successful struggle to win Poland back. Indeed the cult of the "Black Madonna" is so universal that during Gomulka's time as first secretary in the 1960s, the Communists forbade display of the icon in public. The response was processions behind empty picture frames all around the country—to Czestochowa, of course. Thus that small pin on Walesa's lapel has carried an obvious, potent message to Polish society, identifying the real patriots, marking Solidarity, rather than the "historically inevitable" Communists, as the organic outgrowth of the Polish past.

The most important consequence of this fusion of Solidarity to Catholicism was that, when times got tough after the imposition of martial law in December 1981, the leaders of Solidarity fought the temptation to pay the Communists back in kind. They constantly reiterated that Solidarity was grounded in a Christian belief in nonviolence. Non-Christians such as Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron (two of the principal figures associated with KOR, the Workers Defense Committee) accepted these tenets, along with their accompanying overlay of religious symbolism, as readily as professed Catholics such as Walesa, or Poland's current premier, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. During martial law this attitude was written off as hopelessly romantic, and one began to hear "Polish messianism" used as a catch phrase to describe how out of touch the opposition was with the way politics actually functions.

It is unlikely that *Time's* "Man of the Decade," Mikhail Gorbachev, set out to transform his empire because, like Constantine, he saw a cross in the sky. Yet his policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* sufficiently unfroze the politics of Central Europe that room for maneuver became possible. Possible, at least, when the opposition had both the continuity and courage to take *perestroika* and *glasnost* more seriously than their patron had ever intended. Polish resistance to communism proved so persistent because its two-century tradition of religiously inspired opposition found its culmination in Karol Wojtyla, who does see crosses in the sky. He became pope in October 1978. Solidarity was born in 1980 after his triumphal return as John Paul II. In two subsequent visits during the "lean years," of the '80s, Wojtyla nurtured the link between social justice and Catholic belief. That union was especially obvious in the June '87 homily he gave in Gdansk, the birthplace of Solidarity, when he affirmed that Catholics through the Eucharist possess a priceless "solidarity" in Christ.

This spirit found expression, however subdued, in the phlegmatic character of Poland's first postwar non-Communist premier. Tadeusz Mazowiecki's accomplishments are many and varied, but his earlier career, even by the very different set of rules for playing politics imposed by the Communists, represents an unconventional path to power. He is a candidate more likely to head a Catholic newspaper than a government; indeed, when he became premier he was still vice-president of the Warsaw branch of KIK, the Catholic Intellectuals' Club, which he had helped establish in 1957. Like virtually all the other major Solidarity figures, he was "interned" after the Jaruzelski government announced a "state of emergency" on December 13, 1981. And with everyone in Poland who opposed communism, Mazowiecki has a lifetime of scores to settle: opportunities denied, talents underutilized, harassments petty and large. Yet from his very first presentation to the *Sejm*, Poland's parliament, Mazowiecki made it clear there would be no vendetta against the *nomenklatura*, that the criteria for retaining a position within the political bureaucracy would be competence and loyalty. He maintained correct, even respectful relations with Jaruzelski and Czeslaw Kiszczak (then the head of Poland's internal security forces), the men most responsible for imprisoning him.

Viewed from this perspective, the recrafting of national policies is a constant opportunity—given our theme, perhaps we should say, temptation—to pay the Communists back in kind for a half-century of persecution. Mazowiecki and his key Solidarity asso-

Mark DeFoe

Hell

It's the mind truth sears like a hot poker
not our poor flesh. The lasting agony
of everlasting fire is memory.
Our lives twist on the grill. We're the jokers

in silly aprons basting our own hearts,
blackening them over embers of sorrow,
garnished with joys put off until tomorrow,
hopes we maimed, dreams we never let start.

Every innocent we blamed now comes to feast,
gnaw our guilt. And regret, what might have been,
chews our cinder souls. We stew, stink of the sin
of words not spoken. Our past is the beast

who comes to turn us on the spit of shame.
Those we betrayed provide the endless flame.

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ciates in this coalition government continue to resist the temptation, arguing that Christian, not Machiavellian, ethics represent intelligent moral guidelines for policy, and are, in the end, more realistic. The Mazowiecki government has right from the start formulated its foreign policy in a fashion intended to make this break with Communist Polish governments unmistakable. Mazowiecki's first major trip abroad was to the bishop of Rome; only after this did he turn toward Moscow. And even then the key element in his Russian itinerary was the visit to Katyn. The massacre of the Polish officer corps at Katyn by the NKVD became in postwar years the chief symbol of the lie that was public life. The official version represented the massacre as yet another Nazi atrocity. Though that version was passed on through the Polish school system, everyone knew differently. Among the many sources of tension surrounding the first official state visit to the Soviet Union of an entourage from the Solidarity-directed government, the pilgrimage to Katyn was the most profound. Thus the spectacle of a Catholic Mass celebrated in Latin, Polish, and Russian, in the bitter cold of a Russian night at a grave site surrounded by the shadows of giant pines, took on the aspect of a modern miracle, a proof of God's immanence. What was particularly moving was the presence of "God's people," old women especially, remnants of what is left of ethnic Poland within the current borders of the Soviet Union. Unlike the well-orchestrated ceremonials that once characterized this part of the world, at this Mass, Mazowiecki was surrounded by fellow worshipers in the most spontaneous way, his presence, his prayers, were joined to theirs. And the communal repetition of the words, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us," was no hollow vocalization.

On the domestic front, the most obvious sign of a break with the past is Mazowiecki's appointment of Krzysztof Kozlowski to direct Polish surveillance. Kozlowski, a philosopher and journalist, has been a member of the editorial staff of the Catholic weekly, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, since 1956, and in recent times its principal figure, after Jerzy Turowicz. Kozlowski's career has made him a prominent symbol of the Catholic intellectual opposition to the *ancien régime*.

Mazowiecki's insistence on bringing Kozlowski into the government should not be construed to suggest that the Christian spirit of forbearance has made him soft on Communist crime. The premier is by training a lawyer; above all, he is concerned with replacing the Communist *machtstaat* with a *rechtsstaat*. He realizes that social stability will be forged out of the brittle, and bitter, class-divided remnants of Communist rule only if a society habituated to distrusting government can come to trust it. That will only be possible under a broadly accepted, and universally applied, standard of law.

Paul Ramsey

Epitaph for a Mime

He has nothing more now
not to say.

Where social justice has been so long denied, the temptations to score-settling are extreme. While social temperance in Poland has been—and remains—remarkable, anger and frustration are never far from the surface. A reliable gauge of this political atmosphere is *Interpellation*, a TV show, much of whose popularity rests on the opportunity for viewers to call in and ask direct questions of an expert panel. One Thursday evening last April, the featured guest was Jan Maria Rokita, a member of the *Sejm* who cut his political teeth as the head of Solidarity's student branch at Cracow's Jagiellonian University. Now he chairs a special commission investigating notorious cases of police abuse. The show featured footage from the December 16, 1981, "pacification" by the Zomo, a paramilitary security force, of the strike at the Wujek mine resisting martial law. The deaths associated with the Wujek incident are part of the litany of proletarian saints that links worker resistance from Poznan in 1956 to Gdansk in 1970. These, along with the deaths that occurred in demonstrations such as those in Lubin (August 31, 1982), figured prominently in the discussion. At Lubin police fired into the crowd as people were fleeing; the majority of victims were shot in the back.

As viewers called in, the incidents of abuse and the demands for action began to multiply. Rokita was forced to reiterate the limits of his parliamentary mandate and to call attention to the lack of cooperation by the security forces. General Pudysz, representing the *ancien régime*'s surveillance apparatus, took issue with the charges. He was immediately challenged on why, in ninety-three cases of violent attacks against members of the opposition during the '80s, only one had resulted in a successful prosecution. The question was, of course, rhetorical. What gave it special impact was that all the participants along with the viewers knew which that "one" was: the murder of Father Jerzy Popieluszko. The martyrdom of Popieluszko followed by the trial of the security personnel who killed him are critical political events in recent Polish history. Knowing this, the audience also knew why no apologia from General Pudysz would ever satisfy. Any truthful answer would call into question the very nature of the former surveillance system. It would necessarily have to begin by acknowledging that the security police served as shock troops for the Polish state in its war against Polish society. And for that, there is no acceptable defense.

And now there are ninety-four cases. During the night of April 22 an unknown perpetrator(s) doused the door of Jerzy Jachowicz's apartment with gasoline. As a result of leaping to escape the fire, his wife Maria was killed, his daughter seriously injured. Jachowicz writes for Poland's leading newspaper, the Solidarity-inspired *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Of the 146 articles he wrote during its first year, the majority were devoted to investigating the security apparatus. He had received anonymous warnings to stop.

Meanwhile in the *Sejm*, the struggle went on to allot equitably

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the properties of the now defunct PZPR, the United Polish Workers' Party of Gomulka, Gierek, Jaruzelski. The voices became ever more heated. When Minister Alexander Hall insisted on the government's policy of court-determined settlements, his words contrasted sharply with demands from some members, part of the now ascendant "opposition," that all Communist properties be appropriated. As the debate progressed, the irritation and anger directed at the government's position became more and more intense. The hatred was palpable.

Then Adam Michnik came to the podium. If anyone could be excused for roasting a Communist or two over a slow fire, he was the man. First arrested in the '60s as a University of Warsaw student, he spent a large part of the '80s "sitting," as Poles call it, interned by martial law: accused in 1982 of trying to overthrow the government (amnestied in 1984); arrested and sentenced to three years in 1985 (amnestied in 1986). Michnik's intellectual talents match his personal courage. The combination has brought him international recognition: the *Laureat Prix de la Liberté* and the Robert F. Kennedy Award for Human Rights. He is the author of *The Church, the Left, the Dialogue*, but he is not a Christian. Michnik suffers from a severe stammer under stress. After struggling through a synopsis of the anti-Communist rhetoric he had heard in the *Sejm*, Michnik made it clear he would have nothing to do with that sort of politics. At the end of his address he haltingly forced out the declaration in a fashion everyone could understand that he would not be a party to hatred.

These noble sentiments wrested from a recalcitrant tongue were the first prominent manifestation of a broad consensus among the intellectuals that there is an urgent need to rise above the battles over particular issues and press for a different sort of political reform. Only a few days later, Jerzy Turowicz, the chief editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, chose to draw upon the vast capital of respect and admiration he has accumulated over the years to assemble in Krakow some of Poland's most prominent professors and physicians, journalists and artists, all turned political reformers and all elected members of the *Sejm*, who share his growing unease. In some cases, such as that of Marek Edelman, the only leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising to survive, their very existence is a rebuke to the politics of hatred and violence. As their common call to the Polish conscience made plain, they are far from certain about the ultimate success of the Polish democratic experiment.

At that same moment, the week of May 6th, Michnik used *Powszechny* as a forum to catalogue the symptoms of sickness, first in the *Sejm* itself, and then in politics more generally: overwhelming ambitions run riot, like weeds, surrounding and strangling the first fruits of a newly planted democracy; the pompous displays of belated courage; the personal plots and intrigues; the perverse technique of maligning all opponents as one-time embezzlers or crypto-Communists. Why, asked Michnik, the sudden, fierce delight in kicking those who are down, the ever-widening ripples of intolerance, the desire to cart the *ancien régime* off to prison en masse, the dreams of revenge, "this chauvinism, this xenophobia, this egalitarian demagoguery?" Why the sudden explosion of hatred to all those who are different, to scapegoats like gypsies, or those infected with AIDS?

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To people such as Michnik who have dedicated their lives to freeing society from the shackles of totalitarianism, the flawed character of their Prometheus unchained is a source of special anguish. "We proclaimed that our politics would be conducted without violence, without hatred, without revenge. Faithful to the Christian prescription of our culture, we distinguished the sin from the sinners." And again: "We perceive acts of violence, we hear cries of hatred, we encounter calls for revenge. At moments we feel like the sorcerer's apprentice who unleashed an incalculable power."

The end of a totalitarian system does not mean the end of totalitarian practices and thought. As the Reverend Jozef Tischner, one of Poland's most respected and well known theologians, has observed, because communism is a warped reflection of religion, the church (once again) triumphant must acknowledge that, after a half century of subjection, its Catholic faithful to some extent perceive themselves in a deformed way. Tischner, in an article placed in fraternal proximity to that of Michnik's, made clear what Polish intellectuals, clerical and lay, Christian and non-Christian, think is the essential precondition for a stable, successful parliamentary democracy: the restoration of a code of ethics grounded in a sense of individual responsibility.

So all we Poles, say Michnik and Tischner in solidarity, are children of totalitarianism, and carry within ourselves the habits, customs, and scars of that system. If we are to die to that life and rise to a better one we must return our politics to an ethic that does not try to shift blame, but which forthrightly accepts the inverse: each individual is responsible—for everyone and everything. Michnik sums up this position in the following way:

> We are fated to a life lived out in tension, in uncertainty, in eternal risk. But that does not mean that we know nothing. We are children of our tradition. And we know that this tradition does not permit us to resign from the truth with impunity. We are children of our Judeo-Christian culture and we know that this culture, while prescribing loyalty to the government, only permits bending one's knees before God....Yes, it is true that in the face of the many pitfalls of contemporary politics we stand helpless, and so here it is precisely that we reach for our roots, to the ethics of the strength of the powerless or, put simply, to the injunctions of the Ten Commandments. Everything else is a lie and has the bitter taste of hypocrisy."

For Walesa, by contrast, what matters most is how to empower the hitherto powerless. At the moment of Solidarity's tenth anniversary, August 31, its "uncommon common man" was determined to make sure that the workers—who formed Solidarity and kept its spirit alive through a decade of repression, who ultimately were the social force that reformed the social contract—not become the primary victims of a restructured economy. If his decision to run for president means confrontation with former Communists or for that matter with former allies, such as Michnik and Mazowiecki, so be it.

John Paul's "Appeal for Unity and Solidarity" on June 11, urged that the war of words cease, that Poles all over the world turn in prayer towards Czestochowa, beseeching God that this common prayer be transformed into a common consensus. It is still not clear that the pope's appeal is being heeded and his prayers answered. But whether or not Poles carry off their great sociopolitical experiment and create a new version of their old republic, their struggle to keep Solidarity a vehicle for social justice should make clear to all those who are inclined to trivialize politics—East or West—that the preeminent political question since Plato, "What is the Good?" must be taken seriously as a moral imperative if the struggle over its material form is to produce both life-giving and life-preserving fruit.

SCREEN

IMPROBABLE BLUES

LEE'S 'MO' BETTER BLUES'

In some works of art, we encounter ambiguities that can trouble us into an awareness of the mystery of life. But sometimes ambiguities are bred by, and can only deepen, confusion. A perfect cinematic specimen of each of these two types of ambiguity can be found in Spike Lee's last two movies: *Do the Right Thing* and *Mo' Better Blues*.

Do the Right Thing was so full of ambiguities that it could be denounced by social commentators both on the right (Richard Grenier in the *Washington Star*) and on the left (Murray Kempton in *New York Newsday*) as irresponsible and even incendiary. I had my own reservations but felt that the film was a brilliant anatomy of how racism can anesthetize the moral sense and the common sense. What impressed me most about the film was what Lee's accusers conveniently overlooked: the white characters were created by this angry black filmmaker with as much sympathy as, and *more* complexity than, the black roles. (Danny Aiello's Sal was the best written and played American movie character of 1989). Even the one irredeemable bigot, Pino, was made understandable. By the time the climactic riot broke out, we knew exactly why Moogie threw the garbage can through Sal's store window, yet could not applaud violence visited upon human beings we had come to understand as well as we understood Sal and his sons. The ambivalencies on display in *Do the Right Thing* (the love of bigoted white kids for black performers; the mingled awe and resentment some blacks feel toward other people "of color" who open successful businesses in black communities; the way racist words find their way into the mouth of a nonracist) didn't make for effective riot-mongering. And *Do the Right Thing* didn't provoke riots.

Mo' Better Blues won't either. How could it? This movie endorses (in ascending order of importance) sexual fidelity, respect for one's parents, responsible parenting, family unity, and baseball. A noble and meritorious list, to be sure. But what Spike Lee neglects to do is to show his characters moving toward health and stability in a believable and dramatically gripping way. In fact, his new movie is confusing and bespeaks a momen-

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tarily confused creator. *Mo' Better Blues* is full of dramatically fruitless ambiguities.

The movie begins with some neighborhood kids standing outside the apartment of their friend Bleek and yelling up to him to come out and play baseball. But Bleek's mother wants her son to stay in and practice the trumpet. Bleek protests that he hates the trumpet and loves baseball. Why can't he join his pals? Bleek's father, a former ball player, agrees—"Why don't you let the boy be a boy?"—but Mama prevails. Little Bleek, hating every note he blows, keeps on practicing.

Cut. It's twenty years later and Bleek is grown up and blowing that trumpet in a night club and—zounds!—the lad has become a genius! He looks like a genius because Denzel Washington (in a fine performance) endows Bleek with the cool concentration of a master surgeon. And he sounds like a genius because Terence Blanchard of the Branford Marsalis quartet is doing the trumpeting on the soundtrack. But how are we to believe that big Bleek is now a jazz genius after we saw that little Bleek wanted so desperately to swing not with a band but at a ball? Yes, in real life, even future virtuosi have wanted to get away from the drudgery of practice but, sooner or later, the quest for perfection begins. Is it too much to ask of Lee that he provide some point of transition? Or does Spike Lee, himself the son of musician Bill Lee (who composed much of the music for this film), really think that if Mom yells loud and long enough, the muse Euterpe simply capitulates and touches little fingers and lips with irresistible genius? Lee does nothing to hint at the roots of Bleek's genius. Fruitless ambiguity number one.

Bleek plays like an angel but is a devil with women, carrying on simultaneous affairs with Indigo, a sweet schoolteacher, and Clark, a would-be singer who is as ambitious and egocentric as her lover. But, though it's believable enough for the schoolteacher to complain of Bleek's unfaithfulness, why does Clark mouth the identical accusations? Surely, it's clear she doesn't want commitment from him but a boost to her career. Indeed, when one of Bleek's rivals promises help, she sleeps with him. Lee doesn't explore Clark's contradictions. Fruitless ambiguity number two.

Bleek's manager, Giant (a nickname given to the runt played by Lee himself), quarrels with Bleek's sidemen, is incompetent at financial negotiations, gambles with the band's earnings, and then begs the players for loans to pay his debts. Bleek's fellow players clamor for Giant's dismissal, but Bleek—ruthless, selfish, career-obsessed—can't bring himself to fire Giant. Why? Is it because Giant was one of those childhood pals screaming for Bleek to come out and play ball? Very well. The conflict between the demands of the heart and the demands of career is a valid subject for dramatization. Martin Scorsese (Spike Lee's film school mentor) took this very problem as one of the themes of his first major film, *Mean Streets*. But in that film Scorsese so fully dramatized the relationship between the decent, conscience-ridden Charley and the sociopath Johnny Boy that we understood very well why Charley was unable to cut himself off from his very inconvenient buddy. Nowhere in *Blues* do we see what it is in Giant that makes Bleek so uncharacteristically forbearing. What we are shown constantly is Bleek's intolerance for anything that stands in the way of his career. So, again, why doesn't he fire the egregious Giant? Fruitless ambiguity number three.

Debt-collecting thugs catch up with Giant and administer a terrible beating, recorded by Lee in gloating, grisly close-up, with amplified thuds. (Who says that Spike Lee isn't a mainstream American filmmaker?) Is Bleek ultimately responsible for Giant's undoing? The way the beating (in an alley outside a nightclub) is intercut with Bleek (inside the club) blowing away suggests that Bleek's concern with his craft has made him oblivious to the pain of his friend, but, seconds later, Bleek is in the alley and his apparently sincere protest to the gangsters—"I would have gotten you your money in a couple of days!"—indicates that only bad timing has brought Giant low. Fruitless ambiguity number...well, I've lost count.

In any case, Bleek's fury at the gangsters leads to his own pulverization, and the beating wrecks the trumpeter's embouchure (adjustment of mouth to mouthpiece). It's Dark Night of the Soul Time for our hero: hospital, soul-searchings, a failed comeback, the loss of Clark to his rival, and then...Bleek is at last ready to commit himself! He proposes to Indigo and is accepted. A marriage to fill the gap made by his artistic impotence? A shaky union destined to collapse?

Guess again. The conclusion of this movie is a lightning tour through conjugal bliss. The marriage ceremony is a glorious outdoor reunion photographed in golden tones like wedding pictures come to life. Cut. Indigo is blissfully pregnant. Cut. Now she's being sped to the delivery room and don't think that Bleek is the squeamish sort who paces the waiting room. Are you kidding? This guy is a walking advertisement for the Lamaze method. He's got the gown and the mask on, he's in the delivery room, he's helping Indigo with the deep breathing, now the baby is coming out, the cord is snipped, it's a boy! Cut. Baby's first birthday. Cut. Several more birthdays. Cut. Bleek, Jr. is being given a horn! And now some pals are outside yelling for their chum to quit practicing so that he can play ball with them. Oh, oh. Is another little genius being doomed to musical greatness? Not to worry. Mama Indigo does protest that Junior should practice, but this time Papa prevails. The boy gets outside, leaving his trumpet behind. Happy ending. Baloney.

Working with a shoddy script, Lee has made a movie that shows his genius-hero able to find true happiness only through the loss of the very art that exercised his genius. Lee's directorial technique is messed up as badly here as Bleek's mouth. He shoots a quarrel between Giant and band members by panning back and forth from one shouting face to another. The result is vertigo in the viewer instead of comprehension of the mounting anger. Bleek's proposal to Indigo, the climax of the movie, is shot and edited so haphazardly that it looks as if a roving cameraman had stumbled upon a courtship in a hallway. The scene has no rhythm, no build.

I hope that Spike Lee will give his next script a good rereading before committing himself to production. And I hope that he will take off his smile button long enough to tap the bitter, Rabelaisian, and deeply compassionate vein from which issued *Do the Right Thing*.

RICHARD ALLEVA

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STAGE

ASYLUM DENIED

GALLAGHER'S 'DE DONDE?'

When the Festival Latino played at Joseph Papp's Public Theater last summer, each of the offerings carried a label indicating the country of its origin. A cuckoo in that Central and South American nest was one identified as coming from Cincinnati, Ohio. The play was *De Dónde?* Despite the Spanish title, it is an American play by an American author concerning a problem that is as much ours as it is that of the refugees from Central America. My use of *American* here is admittedly provincial, but unitedstatesian is awkward and Yankee (or Yanqui) sounds better in the mouths of those facing our border patrols and agents of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Mary Gallagher, a playwright and novelist, an actor (she was in this production) and director, did research in Texas for this play, which was produced in Houston and Woodstock and published in *American Theatre* (November 1989) before it was staged at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. That is the production which came to the Public Theater.

In notes accompanying the published edition, Gallagher explains that *De Dónde?*—"Where are you from?"—is "the first question which INS agents ask Hispanics whom they suspect of being aliens." Her play, a combination of documentary and sentimental vignettes, is set in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, in a context in which that question can be dangerous, even fatal. If the answer is "Mexico"—whether the answerer *is* Mexican or has simply learned that this is a good answer—the refugee will simply be put back across the border where he or she can try again and again, hoping finally to elude the patrols. If, however, the answer is "Guatemala," "El Salvador," or some other Central American country which Washington refuses to recognize as a danger to its own citizens, the refugee ends up in a processing center where he or she waits for a hearing to request asylum, a request which is almost certain to be denied. "We file a thousand asylum claims a year," says Lynne, head of a law firm working with the detainees. When asked how many she has got asylum for in the last three years, she holds up three fingers. The result is deportation which—as with Oscar in this play—may mean execution when he is returned to his home country.

The play is designed to be performed by thirteen Hispanic and Anglo actors, playing forty roles. The scenes are often brief and much of the material is not so much dramatic as announced—letters, petitions, evidence, recited by sympathetic characters. Since I had read the play, I had no trouble following the abrupt shifts; but the person who saw it with me—a regular playgoer—often lost track of the changing roles, particularly when an actor with a recognizable presence stepped offstage and came back as someone else. In a way, Gallagher's attempt to present a wide range of characters muddled the line of her play. Not grievously, since there was no mistaking the political thrust of the work.

She attempts to be fair in circumstances that could have reduced the material to satiric cartoon. There is an inevitable vicious guard in the processing center, but the chief villains are indifference, letter-of-the-law nitpicking, and, of course, the offstage Washington policy that sees abstractions where there are suffering people. There are Hispanic characters who see the illegals as threats to their own precariously held positions; those who see the INS as an employer who allows them to escape the minimum-wage, fast-food trap; those who are a comfortable part of the rejecting establishment. There are Anglos—the lawyers, two nuns—who devote themselves to the cause of the detainees. But even these are presented with an edge. The good-guy Anglo lawyers are unwittingly condescending to the Hispanics with whom they work.

To avoid making *De Dónde?* simply an animated editorial, a walking, talking information-giver, Gallagher has provided stories to give flesh to the material. Oddly, she more often produces dramatic stereotypes. The slowly developing attachment between Pete, an Anglo paralegal, and *La Extraña*, who—at first out of fear, then out of policy—will not answer the titular question and so cannot be deported, ends sentimentally in their marriage; there may well be romantic unions along the Rio Grande, but this one seems to grow out of Gallagher's desire for a positive note in a situation in which Oscar's story is the expected one. A nun's decision to risk her own freedom and the shelter she runs to smuggle out of the area a young man who faces certain deportation and death is romanticism of a more acceptable kind because surely the tradition of the Underground Railroad is still alive in this country.

As a theater piece, *De Dónde?* has obvious weaknesses. As a testimony, a lament, a plea for all our concern, it is very effective.

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Empowered to forgive

A MIRACLE, A UNIVERSE
Settling Accounts with Torturers
Lawrence Weschler
Pantheon, $22.95, 293 pp.

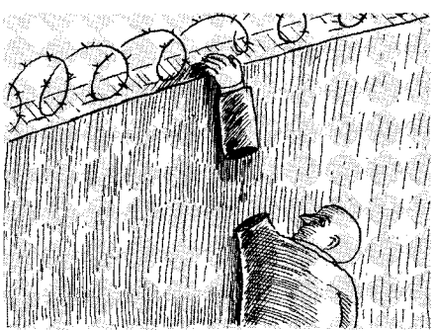
Lee Siegel

Torture is absolutely evil, and in the moment—or the hours—of its infliction, its victims are absolutely innocent, even if their crime was heinous. Most of the Brazilian and Uruguayan victims of state-sponsored torture in *A Miracle, A Universe* ("If you destroy one soul, you destroy a universe" is the paraphrase of a Talmudic commentary) were sent to their ordeal simply for trying to breathe in a political vacuum. For them, justice means the official acknowledgment of the source of their private pain; the healing of their shattered lives—insofar as it is possible—is bound up with their need to call the torturers to account and publicly tell the truth about the not-so-distant past.

Lawrence Weschler, a staff writer for the *New Yorker* (where much of this book first appeared) and the author of award-winning reportage on Solidarity and martial law in Poland, also believes in the redemptive importance of such a reckoning. Yet, as he ruefully notes, it may never happen. In Brazil and Uruguay, as in Argentina and Chile, the military quietly made an unconditional amnesty for its crimes either the principal condition for the transition to civilian rule or, after allowing power to change hands, the *sine qua non* for democracy's continuation.

Eventually, the fragile new government in all four countries acceded to the generals' demands. But not everyone accepted the compromise. While the politicians hoped for a new beginning, the advocates of a full accounting were less optimistic. Mostly former torture victims themselves, they regarded the terror of the past and the forgetfulness about it that was being enforced in the present as a single iron epoch's sound and echo, beyond which the future lay muffled. They were willing to put that future in jeopardy to be certain that a genuinely humane one existed, and to make sure that the democratic institutions in the process of revival were rooted in honesty, not illusion and deceit. Thus even after the amnesty laws were passed, an attempt was made in Brazil to reveal the historical truth unofficially, and in Uruguay to confront the security forces face to face. *A Miracle, A Universe* is a moving and profound account of those efforts, as well as a deeply disturbing picture of the government-sanctioned depravity that brought such a yearning for justice into the world.

In Brazil, the collective agony lasted a long time before the regime's loosening grip aroused a remarkable will to truth. From 1964 to 1979, following a coup that put the generals in charge until democratically held elections in 1985, thousands of people were imprisoned in the military's campaign against increasing calls for land, labor, and educational reforms. Many such victims of the "doctrine of national security"—i.e. the enemy is within—were tortured in the early days of their detention into making false confessions. After a time, some prisoners were brought to trial before a kangaroo military tribunal, where occasionally they or their lawyers bravely denounced the confession on the ground of coercion. This happened, Weschler reports, in about 25 percent of the cases that made it to trial, and in each instance the court fastidiously summarized the proceedings, incorporating the prisoner's often graphic description of his or her torture, and shipped the entire record of the case, transcripts and all, off to the archives of the Supreme Military Court in Brasilia.



Apparently, the Brazilian dictatorship thought it had had the last word by preserving the irretrievability of its victims' lives as a permanent artifact in that locked room. But in 1979 Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, the archbishop of Sao Paulo, and Jaimie Wright, a Presbyterian minister, resolved to have the regime's own words bear witness against it. As Weschler skillfully tells the story, their risky and elaborate ruse involved about thirty people, including lawyers who checked out files from the archives for the twenty-four-hour limit on the pretext of working on a case. During the last five years of military rule, Arns and Wright and their team secretly photocopied the whole archive—more than a million pages—and then copied it onto microfilm. A pair of trusted journalists compressed the massive material into a book-sized manuscript, which was then conveyed to Vozes, the largest Catholic publishing house in Brazil. Finally, on July 15, 1985, the "miracle" occurred: *Brasil: Nunca Mais*, listing torturers' names, the types of torture, and the places where it was done, appeared and went on to become the biggest nonfiction bestseller in the country's history. (An English translation, titled *Torture in Brazil*, was brought out in the U.S. by Random House in 1986.)

The struggle for justice in Uruguay was more politically ambitious, perhaps because the repression in that small coun-

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"This was one of the most notorious torture centers," my guide said, turning my attention to a gorgeous villa of brick, stone, and grillework.... "The victims were, of course, hooded, so they couldn't enjoy the view. But the torturers could, and I imagine they took many delicious breaks, lounging up there, sunning themselves on the balcony. Now the villa has been decommissioned, and bought by a private party." The car in the driveway bore military plates.

—Lawrence Weschler
A Miracle, A Universe

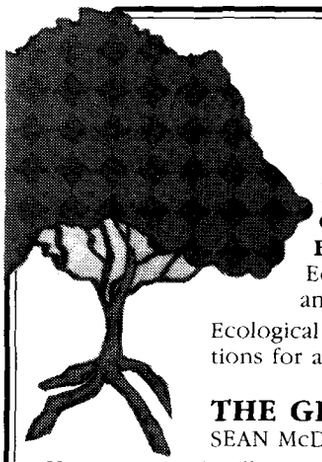
try, once known as the "paradise of fat cows," had been several times more ferocious. The regime became so swept by lunacy that, at one point, it forbade a concert pianist to perform Ravel's "Piano Concerto for the *Left* Hand." By the end of the twelve-year-long military revolution, between 300,000 and 400,000 people out of a population of just under 3 million had fled the country; one out of every fifty Uruguayans who stayed had at some time been detained and interrogated; and one out of every five hundred had been jailed on political charges.

Here, as in the section on Brazil, Weschler pointedly traces the way in which this political war on society was preceded by an economic war of sorts on the communal fabric of society. It is a sadly undeniable fact that in the case of Uruguay, like Chile, the abstract economic experiments of "Chicago boys" like Milton Friedman, together with American economic interests, helped inspire the generals to impose a domestic policy that was creating great wealth for a relative few Uruguayans, but throwing the majority of the people into poverty—or, as Eduardo Galeano, the prominent Uruguayan writer acidly quips to the author, "In Uruguay people were in prison so that prices could be free."

People were also being suspended from the ceiling and beaten, shocked with electrodes, submerged in water until nearly drowned, and driven mad by more subtle psychological techniques in the central jail, perversely named *Libertad*. The government's justification for all this was that it was trying to ferret out the *Tupamaros*, a small Marxist faction that had begun by staging clownish acts of protest and had gradually descended into an inexorable cycle of violence. Indeed, many Uruguayans still blame the guerrillas for the country's nightmare, yet Weschler argues that at the time of the coup in 1973, the *Tupas* had been almost completely destroyed, and had constituted less a threat to Uruguay's stability than a convenient political opportunity.

What happened after the military's abdication in 1985 leaves no doubt that, for better and for worse, history is without end. In February 1987 a fairly broad-based coalition of citizens' groups courageously started a campaign to repeal the general amnesty law, which the civilian government had extended the previous December to include the security forces. A petition was signed and a referendum eventually held in April 1989, while along the way the military did everything it could to prevent first one and then the other from materializing. In the end, 53 percent of those who voted chose to uphold the law. Yet the therapeutic value, in both individual and social terms, of the dramatic attempt to overturn it was inestimable. A power that had once made society tremble had been loudly and, most important of all, unforgettably defied.

The victims of that power in Brazil and Uruguay—or currently under malevolent governments, left and right, throughout the world—had their bodies broken into, their identities stolen and hidden from them behind the omnipresent gaze of the regime. What they still seek is to violate the torture chambers, drag out the secret crimes, and in so doing recover the force of their individual wills. Once powerless, they want the "*power* to forgive," and that could indeed pose a danger to them and to their societies, for it also implies the power to punish, and creates the possibility of another hell. Nevertheless, taking such a risk, as Weschler eloquently concludes, seems to be the only answer to torturers whose single article of faith is their assurance to the victim that "No one will ever know."



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BROADENING THE CONVERSATION

THE SCREENING OF AMERICA
Tom O' Brien
Crossroad/Continuum, $19.95, 220 pp.

Mary Pat Kelly

In a summer when Vincent Canby's discussion of current films was headlined "And Now at a Theatre Near You: A Skyrocketing Body Count," Tom O'Brien's book *The Screening of America: Movies and Values from Rocky to Rain Man* is especially welcome. O'Brien speaks in his preface of the need for "works that broaden conversation about our culture and values." His book addresses that need by providing an opportunity for "people who go see movies for fun, escape, or enlightenment to reflect on what they have seen." O'Brien's easy and accessible style made me feel as if he were an especially well-informed member of a group of friends at a Chinese restaurant,discussing the movie we had all just seen at the neighborhood theater.

Such discussions are needed. What are movies now anyway? *Dick Tracy* seemed merely a vehicle for paraphernalia, and Canby calls the action-adventure movies of the summer such as *Total Recall* and the sequels *Die Hard 2* and *Robocop II* "Grand Guignol for the new age." Like the plays of violence, rape, murder, and suicide produced at the old Theatre du Grand Guignol to titillate decadent Parisians, these vehicles of mayhem seem to be intended to evoke visceral sensations in jaded and desensitized audiences. "Pain and terror don't have to be understood, merely enjoyed as entertainment. But what exactly is entertainment?" O'Brien asks.

O'Brien maintains that movies, often in spite of themselves, "embody powerful social myths." Intentionally—or not, "in blockbusters or flops, in message films or sexploitation in *Wall Street*, or one of Freddy's nightmares—myths, half-truths, and value judgments emerge from all kinds of films whatever their artistic quality." O'Brien is particularly interested in the values movies embody—an element many critics avoid, he says, for fear of appearing narrowly moralistic. While not neglecting the aesthetic element of movies, O'Brien is more interested in the assumptions behind movies and how films fostered and reflected an evolution of cultural values during the 1980s. He chooses to organize his book around themes such as work, sports, home, environment, heroines, justice, and religion that have shown particular development in the last decade.

O'Brien, a teacher himself, begins with "Teaching." Films with this theme provide rich ground for the kind of insightful discussion that marks the book. After pointing out the cliché teachers in comedies such as *Fame, Breakfast Club, Porky's*, and *Summer School*, O'Brien moves on to more serious portrayals of education in *Stand and Deliver, Dead Poets Society*, and *Lean on Me*. He sees in these films a reflection of "our uncertainty about how to solve some of the basic problems of American education." O'Brien goes beyond the obvious in his analysis of each one. He points out that *Dead Poets Society* assumes an essential opposition between order and freedom. Robin Williams is a "proto flower child," who, while he awakens his prep students, may not actually teach them much.

Order is applauded in *Lean on Me*, when Morgan Freeman as principal Joe Clark takes over an anarchic Paterson, New Jersey, high school. "Discipline is not the enemy of enthusiasm," Freeman announces, instituting a policy of toughness. *Stand and Deliver* reasserts the value of teaching itself in a portrait of an impassioned math teacher in a tough, largely Hispanic, California high school. Neither film, O'Brien points out, deals with the effect lack of money has on education. The chapter on teaching is a good example of the rewards of *The Screening of America*. Hollywood usually has trouble with the complexity of the issues it raises.

In his discussion of work, O'Brien shows how movies such as *Wall Street, Working Girl, Gung Ho*, and *Tucker* reflect "our culture's confusion over the value of hard work." Sports films such as *Bull Durham* and *Field of Dreams* speak to the idea of "winning" and what it means in life as well as sports.

O'Brien sees a neotraditionalist trend reflected in "Home Movies" such as *Parenthood* and *Moonstruck*, but he also sees this renewed interest in the family as an "attempt to make sense out of the past and to reconcile the diverse heritage left by the fifties and sixties."

Even when I disagreed with particular judgments on individual films, I found O'Brien's arguments stimulating. For example: Alan Parker's decision to make heroes of the FBI and neglect the African-American community in *Mississippi Burning* completely undercut the film for me. O'Brien, however, points out that many young people have only a vague notion of those years and the film is a useful place to begin their education.

Under the heading "Irony," O'Brien categorizes humor as a response to disillusionment. The line he draws between irony and cynicism seems to depend on a personal sense of what is funny, however.

Religion in the movies raises many important questions. O'Brien's discussion of *The Last Temptation of Christ* is especially thoughtful. I would add one small detail—the film was not banned in Ireland and in fact the Irish reacted much more calmly than did Americans. Still, O'Brien's discussion of the reasons for the storm surrounding the film underscores a principal aspect of his thesis. "In my view, the fact that some people indulge in moralistic, intolerant discussion of the relation of the arts and social values is the last reason to stop discussing this relation intelligently. Indeed, the opposite would seem to be the case; silence about the relation of art and values may only be counter-productive. As America faces the nineties, it may be that the main reason that we have to fear the imposition of a narrow, intolerant moralistic values agenda is the absence, or silence, of a morally concerned, pluralist one."

The Screening of America is a fine example of such articulate moral concern.

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A LANGUAGE WE NEVER LEARNED

BOHIN MANOR
Tadeusz Konwicki
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $19.95, 240 pp.

Thomas Swick

"No one can have any conception of what boredom really means until he has been to the tropics," Evelyn Waugh once wrote, an assessment that occurred to me while reading this account of a late nineteenth-century Lithuanian summer at Bohin Manor. The empty stillness before a storm, the social calls of boring neighbors, the old clocks chiming the hour all seem to give serious competition to the Congo:

"She took a Bible with a tattered spine from a small shelf. She opened the cover and on the first page saw the crooked letters she had penciled there a quarter of a century ago. I'm so awfully tired of my life, she thought. My empty life which wouldn't even tire out a cat.

"She looked out the window...."

She is Helena Konwicka, the author's grandmother, who, at the age of thirty, is, we are told, the most beautiful unmarried woman in the district. She looks out the window often in this novel, not just out of boredom, but in fearful hope of seeing Elias Szyra, the young Jew who desires her and promises to release her from this sentence of provincial tedium.

The author's voice occasionally interrupts the action—if this is not too strong a word for such a languorous novel—with the kind of existential doubts and musings readers have come to expect from Konwicki, albeit in works of more contemporary themes. We learn that this is a personal exploration, a fictional hypothesis, of his grandmother's life, which has always been unknown to him. And now, sensing the end of his own life approaching, he feels the need to get close to hers.

Helena Konwicka lives with her father at Bohin Manor "in a horrible province that no one in the world has ever heard of." Their own estate, nearby, was lost to them after the failed uprising of 1863. The father, Michael Konwicki, stopped talking the day after that desperate revolt, promising not to utter another word until his country was free.

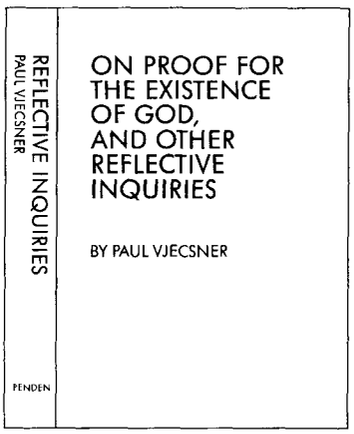
In the hot, dry summer in which the novel takes place, Helena becomes engaged to an uninteresting landowner by the name of Alexander Broel-Plater. Mr. Plater, who is often seen getting into or out of his carriage, displays all the conventional manners and witticisms of the day, and is plainly insufferable to Helena. His unromantic view of marriage is shown, toward the end of the book, to be downright calculating: he needs to take a wife so as not to lose his own estate.

Helena frets about the consequences of her acquiescence, but it is clear that, in her mind, she has no other choice. "Will I still be free?" she asks herself, swimming one day in the Wilia River. "But have I ever been free? What does freedom mean for an ordinary person?" She gets no help from her father, whose defeated shrugs betray no opinion one way or the other.

And then into this dull life comes Elias Szyra, passionate and worldly. It is an old theme—American readers will think of William Inge's *Picnic*—here with particular Polish overtones. For the daughters of landowners in nineteenth-century Poland, and Lithuania, did not involve themselves romantically, or in many other ways, with Jewish men. It is not necessarily distaste or distrust which Helena feels for Jews but rather an unbridgeable distance from them. While Poles and Jews occupied the same plot of earth for centuries, and interacted on a daily basis, the most personal and hence fundamental aspects of their lives were seldom shared. Walking through the Jewish quarter of Bujwidze, Helena hears "moaning and lamenting, in that language that none of us had ever learned in all those centuries."

This reflection comes toward the very end of the book, after Helena, almost against her will, gives in to Elias's advances. She becomes obsessed with him, but her personal feelings cannot conquer the social conventions and prejudices of centuries, and she sends him unwillingly away. It is on hearing of his daughter's pregnant state that Michal Konwicki utters his first words

ON PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, AND OTHER REFLECTIVE INQUIRIES
PAUL VJECSNER



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since the uprising, and seeks revenge.

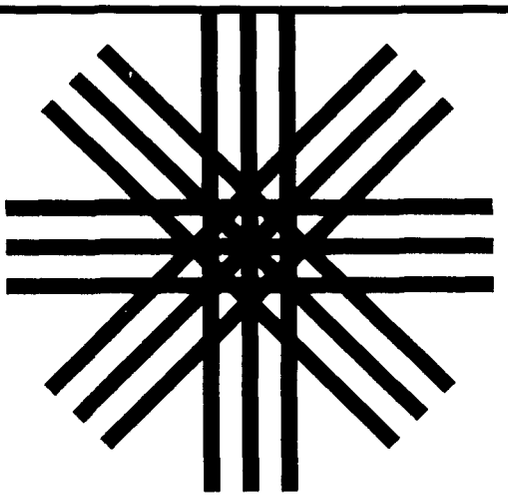
While it has many of the traditional elements, including the jacket cover, this is not a romantic idyll. In some ways in fact it is the antithesis, and appears in stark contrast to Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*, the great verse epic also set in Lithuania and learned by every Polish school child. Konwicki at times alludes to the work—Elias tells Helena he wants to be called "Tadeusz"—and even includes a writing from the young Mickiewicz. But "Pan Tadeusz," composed in Paris by the homesick poet, presents an idyllic view of Lithuanian manor life in the early nineteenth century, and has none of the stark, oppressive boredom and unspoken sense of futility that Konwicki, with his twentieth-century vision, feels.

And there are, added to the author's own personal appearances, incursions by other characters from previous and future times. Pilsudski appears as a young boy hitching a ride, Stalin shows up as the omnipresent police inspector, and Hitler is embodied in a horrible, man-eating monster haunting the countryside and bearing the name of Schicklgruber. There is even an allusion to the young child Lenin, and the telling of his birth bears eerie similarities to the biblical story of Christmas.

> *I am bleary now and this is my last voyage in literature, a senseless trip without fixed destination. My head is bursting, and my heart too may be coming apart at the seams. And I don't know how to reach my grandmother and immerse myself in that long forgotten commonality of life, when there were few people and many gods, or when there will be many people and no god.*
>
> —Tadeusz Konwicki
> *Bohin Manor*

Yet despite these modern literary devices, the book represents a departure from Konwicki's previous work. Books like *A Minor Apocalypse* and *The Polish Complex* took a harsh, uncompromising look at modern Poland. Here you get the sense that Poland is so much in flux that it is impossible to comment on it, or, rather, that Konwicki is finally tired of doing so. Clearly, and perhaps exaggeratedly, he feels himself fading from the contemporary scene.

Throughout his life as an artist, Konwicki has made a career of going against the tide. And so, now, from this country so eagerly looking to the West, he directs our attention to the East; out of a land desperately aiming toward the future, he gives us a beautifully disturbing look at the past.



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LEE SIEGEL *is a free-lance writer living in New York City.*

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THOMAS SWICK *is travel editor of the* Sun-Sentenal *in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He writes frequently on Poland.*

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Cents & incense

Lawrence S. Cunningham

Justo Gonzalez's tidy book on early Christian ideas about wealth is an attempt to describe the relationship between early Christian faith and what today we would call the economy. If the early Christians did not speak *ex professo* about the economy it is because neither they nor their Roman counterparts had a coherent theory of economic matters. They understood inflation, taxation, prices, etc. on a pragmatic level, but as Gonzalez notes, the Roman Empire did not even have a budget until it was already in serious decline in the days of Diocletian.

What Gonzalez makes quite clear is that one cannot anachronistically retroject into the early sources readings which would give comfort either to the contemporary ideological Left or to the Right although the former would find more comfort than the latter. The early "communism" of the Acts of the Apostles and the subsequent emphasis on "sharing" *(koinonia)* was a strategy to both succor the poor and to resist discrimination based on wealth. Later exhortations to the wealthy to take care of the needs of the poor and to avoid the traps of wealth did not have in them an explicit theology of social justice as we would understand it today. Even Clement of Alexandria's treatise in defense of the rich (*Quis Dives Salvetur*) was an admonitory treatise on the dangers of wealth and the foolishness in flattering of the rich for gain.

Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money, *by Justo L. Gonzalez, Harper and Row, $19.95, 240 pp.*

When the church gained its freedom after Constantine we see a whole literature emerging which worries about the financial support of the state and makes passionate pleas in behalf of the impoverished masses. This literature reflected the actual conditions of the day while repeating warnings about the dangers of wealth; warnings which were as common in pagan literature as in that of the Christians. Gonzalez helps us by tracing out both pagan and Jewish attitudes toward wealth in the period.

What remains a constant, right through to the late patristic period, is (1) a rejection of usury; (2) a warning against the accumulation of wealth as an end in itself; (3) a belief that all worldly wealth is the common property of all and the attendant right of the poor and disadvantaged to make a claim on it. Extreme views about private property or the currently obnoxious notion that "greed is good" is at total variance with the early Christian tradition.

Everyone interested in the relationship of theology to matters economic would benefit from a reading of this careful survey. Gonzalez not only comes to conclusions but points to other areas of research still to be done. The author tells us that he wrote his book as a service to those interested in liberation theology. He is to be thanked for that service.

In the 1950s, Catholic theologians began to turn their attention to the question of whether everything that the fifth century Council of Chalcedon defined about Christ (two natures, human and divine, in one person) ended any further need to reflect theologically on Jesus the Christ. Their answer was that we had a real need to recover the full humanity of Christ. One of my students put it inelegantly but well: Christ was not just God in a Jesus suit.

Recent approaches to Jesus Christ tend to emphasize "low" Christology (beginning with his humanity) rather than "high" Christology (a consideration of his divinity) and "ascending" Christology (beginning with Jesus in his earthly mission and then moving toward transcendental claims about him) as opposed to "descending" Christology which begins with the Logos before creation and then moves to a consideration of his earthly life.

The first wave, to use Elizabeth Johnson's metaphor, which tried to do fuller justice to the humanity of Christ, in the late 1950s, was followed by a second set of waves: how does one incorporate an understanding of Jesus into the search for justice? As a response to the needs of the oppressed? In relationship to the world of women? More recent Christological discussions, in short, wrestle not only with the humanity of Jesus but his relationship to the human story in its polyvalent complexity.

In a brief book, fashioned from addresses she has given over the years, Johnson surveys the current state of Christology. Her work has two conspicuous merits: it is briskly written and in command of the sources. It is blessedly free of footnotes but each chapter has an annotated bibliography of pertinent works in English. Anyone wishing a balanced view of current Catholic writing on Christology (she comments on everyone from the current pontiff to the liberationists) would find a steady guide in this little work. It makes a fine narrative companion to Monika Hellwig's recent Christological survey in *Theological Studies* (September 1989) and, as such, gives us the *status questionis* on this central issue in theological discussion today.

Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology, *by Elizabeth A. Johnson, Crossroad, $14.95, 149 pp.*

Johnson covers familiar terrain (e.g., the impact of biblical studies on Christology; the current debate over salvation in the non-Christian world) but with passion for her

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

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subject and competency in her judgments. She writes both as a professional theologian (she is a professor at Catholic University) and as a committed churchwoman. She also rewards us with striking asides. Some day, she says, some bishop will be imaginative enough to consecrate a church under the protection of God the Good Homemaker instead of God the Good Shepherd (see Luke 15:1-10 to get her point). It is a good suggestion in a good book.

While we await Schillebeeckx's final volume of his trilogy on Christology, it is good to be reminded that the Dutch theologian, obedient to the Dominican charism of being a friar preacher, still

For the Sake of the Gospel, *by Edward Schillebeeckx, Crossroad, $16.95, 181 pp.*

climbs into the pulpit on a regular basis. This second volume of his sermons gathers together representative homilies and addresses given in the 1980s. A volume of collected sermons finds its proper place in a difficult genre: will it prove to be a classic like Newman's *University Sermons* or will it be one more dusty reminder of past piety or, as is sometime the case, a monument to the preacher's ego?

I would not claim the status of classic for these sermons (some of them reflect contemporary events and will soon reflect the weight of time) but they do have exemplary value in that Schillebeeckx, who has mastered modern biblical criticism as thoroughly as any theologian alive, knows how to transform its technical achievement into serviceable reflections for the Christian community. If these sermons have value, then, it is in their capacity to demonstrate how one can transmute profound scholarship into liturgical proclamation.

Let me emphasize that word *liturgical* because, with few exceptions, these addresses follow the liturgical cycle. Schillebeeckx keeps his eye on that fact. At the end of an Epiphany homily, for instance, he remarks that the adoration of the Magi emphasizes the Eastern penchant for a "high" Christology so it must be seen in tension with Christmas (a more Western feast) where the emphasis is on the "low" Christology of a baby born in a stable. Christmas without Epiphany can lead to sentimentality while Epiphany without Christmas can become ahistorical and abstract.

The biblical character of these sermons does not mean that they are innocent of the world outside the church. Schillebeeckx is sympathetic to the search for social justice, he is critical of the restorationist program of the current pontiff, and is a supporter of the liberal wing of the Dutch church. Those causes are part of his preaching so that amid the sonorities of his homiletical style there are embedded barbs of criticism and concern. Nonetheless, Schillebeeckx's theological project of seeking to understand Jesus the Christ is at the heart of what he preaches. Those who may be a bit intimidated by the sheer bulk of his projected trilogy might wish to begin with these occasional pieces in order to find out what this contemporary theological master is about.

In an earlier column of booknotes (March 9, 1990) I took account of two studies of Simone Weil but McLellan's biography was not then available to me. Readers may forgive my emphasis on Weil by taking note of this new biography which I think is very good indeed. McLellan (an English author-

Utopian Pessimist: The Life and Thought of Simone Weil, *by David McLellan, Poseidon, $22.95, 316 pp.*

ity on Marxism) avoids the common temptations of "reading" Weil as a saint beyond criticism or as an unhealthy neurotic afflicted with eccentric intellectual notions.

McLellan rightly notes that Weil's first works were mostly religious ones. The later writings (some first introduced in France by Albert Camus) were political. It is only from a bit of distance that one can appreciate the interconnections between her earlier and later intellectual preoccupations. A study of her ideas, then, is, almost of necessity, a study of her biography. This McLellan does with a sense of fairness and a clear expository style. What I most liked about this book was the judicious fairness that he brings to his subject as well as his unwillingness to give

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in to facile categorizations. He gives equal attention to her socio-philosophical thinking and her religious experience.

Simone Weil's life intersected with some of the most influential European thinkers of this century at a time when political, social, and religious ideas were in a state of flux. She was a prescient critic of both nazism and Stalinism (when it was very unfashionable for the left to be critical) and her critique of Catholicism, eccentric in places, anticipated many of the issues which would be ventilated at Vatican II, two decades after her death. Her prejudices were monumental (she hated the Old Testament and everything connected with Rome but loved the medieval Cathars), her learning prodigious but eclectic, and her compassion for the poor and downtrodden almost Franciscan in its intensity.

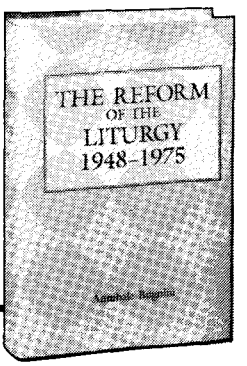
McLellan takes account of, but is not distracted by, the oddity of her personality. She was, as he notes in the conclusion of his study, *peculiar*; a "French version of Kafka, this cross between Pascal and Orwell remains unclassifiable." That strikes me as quite right. She was a precociously brilliant mystic like Pascal (whom, typically, she loathed) and, like her English counterpart George Orwell, a person of the left who had too much integrity to be captured by a party line.

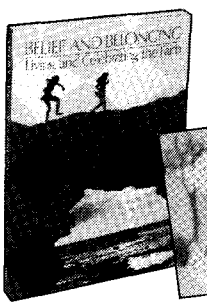
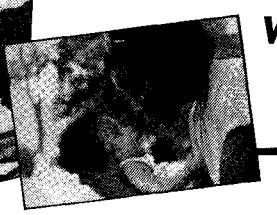
Princeton University has issued two recent books on aesthetics and religion. Martin's work is the more philosophical of the two. He traces, in broad strokes, the concepts of holiness and beauty from the biblical materials down to the modern peri-

Beauty and Holiness: The Dialogue Between Aesthetics and Religion, *by James Alfred Martin, Jr., Princeton, $27.50, 222 pp.*

od to inquire into the relationship of aesthetics and religion. Since it was only in the Enlightenment that we get a philosophical discussion of aesthetics as opposed to religion, Martin seems anxious to get to that period where he feels most at home. As a consequence, such fertile areas as Byzantine theories of the icon or medieval views of sacramentalism and symbology (think of Abbot Suger's explanations of the rebuilding of St. Denis), or even the renaissance/baroque theory of the *concetto* get no mention at all. The main thrust of the book's argument is to show the points of contact between art theory and theological theory with a final plea that art history/history of religion as well as aesthetics/theory of religion continue the dialogue. One conspicuous omission in his survey is the work of David Tracy whose theory of the "classic" and its role in theology is not even mentioned.

I must confess that I found Martin's book austerely bloodless. There was much discussion of theory but almost none about art. The book also had a curious structure. After a straightforward historical survey from the Bible to Wittgenstein there was a Cook's tour of Eastern aesthetics fol-



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lowed by a consideration of an 1978 UNESCO conference on the ends and purposes of art which produced—as one might have guessed—from Martin's gloss on it, some rather gaseous generalities.

Burch Brown's book, by contrast, is an extremely satisfying work. A trained theologian and a musician/composer, he sets out on the difficult path of showing how

Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Meaning and Making, *by Frank Burch Brown, Princeton, $27.50, 225 pp.*

one might consider an aesthetic work to have its own artistic integrity while not severing that integrity from something *more*, i.e., religious significance. One can relate aesthetics to theology by juxtaposing four aspects of theology (theology's concern with truth and meaning; theology's subject matter and theological method) to theories of art.

By using a wide range of examples from all the arts, Burch Brown manages to give an account of the religious character of what, to many moderns, are simply artistic masterpieces. Unlike Martin, he is sensitive to context, and, as a consequence, one finds frequent references to worship and liturgy. He understands, to cite an example of my own (see *Commonweal,* June 2, 1989), that Grünewald's Isenheim crucifixion means something different when seen in its present setting in a Colmar museum than when it stood at the end of a hospital ward full of dying people which was its original setting.

What Burch Brown sets out to show—and I think he shows it persuasively and with wit—is best said in his own words: "Using the Christian tradition and its theology as our primary frame of reference, we will feel confidence that we have located religious meaning within an aspect of art if this aspect can be shown to be positively connected with what Christians regard as ultimately meaningful, and hence meaningful with respect to relations deemed ultimately significant to and before God." His book wrestles with the major theological texts on this subject (e.g., Tillich and Von Balthasar) as well as the more phenomenological works like those of van der Leeuw and Eliade. This is a profoundly useful book which should set the stage for future discussion on this important area of theology and culture. □

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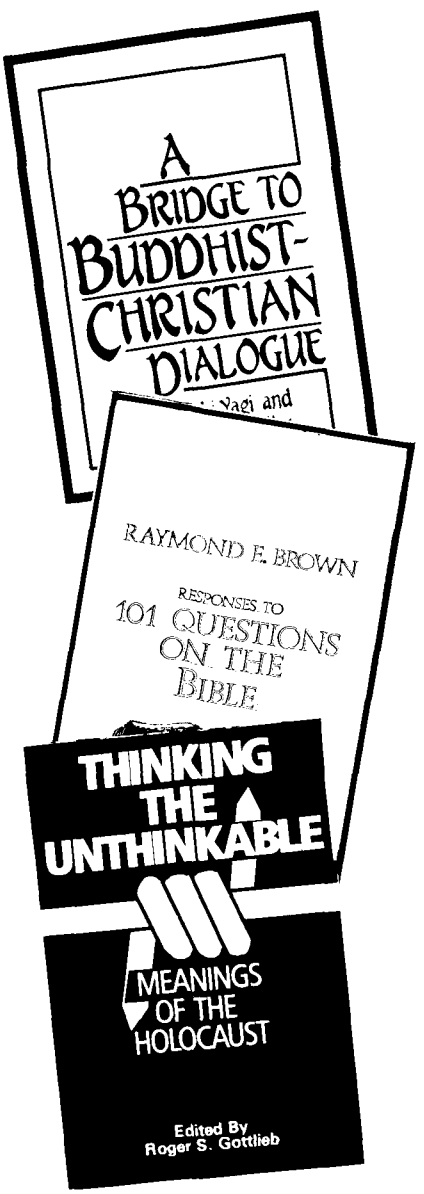
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